MAVIS OF GREEN HILL

FAITH BALDWIN

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BY

FAITH BALDWIN

(MRS. HUGH HAMLIN CUTHRELL)

BOSTON

SMALL, MAYNARD & COMPANY

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To

JEAN WICK

In Gratitude and Affection

MAVIS OF GREEN HILL

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CHAPTER I

GREEN HILL, June

A new doctor has arrived in Green Hill!

Sarah told me so this morning when she brought in my breakfast. She set the tray down with an agitated thump, and after her strong arms had raised me a little higher among the pillows, she stepped back, folded her hands beneath her apron, and fixed me with a portentous eye.

"Now do try and relish your breakfast, Miss Mavis," she coaxed, "there's a good girl!"

An undercurrent of excitement colored her tone. I looked upon her with suspicion. But I know my Sarah. Like Fate, and the village fire-company, she is not to be hurried. Very casually, I reached for my glass of milk. Years of lying comparatively flat on a useless back tend to the development of patience as a necessity.

"What time is it?" I inquired conversationally.

"Past nine."

I set the glass aside, and bit reflectively into a crisp triangle of toast. Since I've become so clever at eating and drinking, there's a sense of adventure about these commonplace functions which no whole person could ever comprehend. Sarah, busying herself with details of window-shades and counterpanes, watching me meanwhile from the corner of her eye, waited until I had turned in-

differently to my pillows again, before making the following terse but thrilling remark.

"Your pink rose-bush's come into blossom, Miss Mavis."

Here was news indeed! My unconcern took unto itself wings and flew away.

"Not really!" I cried, "Oh, Sarah, how perfectly darling of her to waken so early!"

Sarah, accustomed to my extravagant fashion of endowing all growing things with distinct personalities, nodded gravely. And then, with all the majesty of Jove — if one may picture that deity as female, fifty, and New England incarnate — she launched her thunderbolt of Green Hill gossip.

"That young doctor — him that was to come from the city to help Doctor McAllister with his patien's — he's here!"

There was more truth than enunciation in Sarah's neglect of that final "t" in patients. Our village doctor is long on wisdom, but short of temper. I reached out for the morning paper, lying on my bedside table, and rustled it in dismissal.

"How interesting!" I murmured, successfully concealing any concern at all.

Sarah swooped down upon my tray and bore it to the door, in a manner which carried conviction. But we can deceive each other so little, Sarah and I.

"Come last night," she volunteered, "from New York. And every girl in Green Hill is furbishing up her Sunday clothes, so Sammy said."

Sammy, surnamed Simpson, the freckled-faced Mercury who delivers the milk, and is in close touch with all the divers heart-throbs of Green Hill, holds a sentimental,

if unacknowledged appeal for Sarah. A century or two ago, Sammy's father, in those days a gay and unencumbered spark, courted my Sarah, so runs the story, in the public manner of Green Hill. And Sarah, difficult to believe though it be, showed him no disfavor. There was, however, an obstacle to eventual union, in the person of Sarah's invalid mother, a querulous, ninety-pound tyrant. Upon this rock the frail bark of the Simpson affections shattered. This is of history, the most ancient, but had the far-reaching result that Sarah, whose lot seems ever cast among the stricken, now waits on me heart, hand, and foot, while over the Simpson hearthstone another goddess presides, and rigidly too, if one can judge from the harrassed expressions of Sammy, Sr., Sammy, Jr., and all the other innumerable Simpson olive branches.

But to return to our muttons — the palpitating girlhood of Green Hill.

"Silly geese!" I commented unkindly.

Sarah from the doorway looked as cryptic as is consistent with the features Nature had given her.

"Oh, I don't know!" she answered with spirit, and an unconscious effect of argot, "In Green Hill, Miss Mavis, men is scarce!"

Here was truth! Mentally I echoed, "They is!" and Sarah, reading ratification in my silence, achieved a disappearance of my tray, and returned to the attack.

"Sammy says — he was down to the station last night when the ten-six come in — seems like," she digressed, "he's always hanging around the station since Rosie Allan's been telegraph operator there —"

"Rosie is a very pretty girl, Sarah," I chided gently.

"Pretty is as pretty does!" said Sarah, in irrefutable self-defense. "Limb, I call her — bold as brass! But

then," she added in her most pleasant tone, "Sammy was never raised to know better." And she looked at me with that unique light in her eyes which never fails them of the mention of any Simpson delinquency, however slight.

"Sammy says," she continued, bound to pursue the subject to the bitter end, "that the new doctor is a likely-looking young fellow, and seems well off."

At this juncture, I opened my paper with an air of finality.

"If this stranger in our midst is, as you infer, young, handsome, and wealthy," I remarked, "why then, in Heaven's name, has he descended upon Green Hill, Sarah?"

I hate handsome men. They are always so much vainer than women.

Sarah, accustomed as she is to my intemperate habits of speech, regarded me with a somewhat shocked air.

"Sammy says," she quoted — and here the conversational cat leaped from the bag —"that he come down here because he is suffering from nerves!"

The door closed after her, but her contempt lingered, almost tangibly, in the room; and I smothered my laughter in the lavender-scented pillows.

But Sarah had given me something to think about. I have known so few men, young ones, that perhaps I am given to speculating about them even more than the average girl. They're such an unknown quality. And certainly the one or two who have been escorted to my presence have not shown to good advantage. The healthy man reacts unfavorably to invalid feminism. They are bored, or too sympathetic; they speak in whis-

pers, or in too cheery tones; they shuffle their great feet; and escape, eventually, with a sigh of relief. And I am impatient of them, of their bulk and their strength, and the arrogance which is part and parcel of their sex. Perhaps it is because I am handicapped, circumstantially out of the running, so as to speak, that an "eligible" male always arouses in me a feeling of antagonism. And yet with not unremarkable inconsistency, I always wish, wistfully, deep down, that I might make, sometime, a man friend of my own generation. But I can't. Something in me shuts doors and bolts them in any strange, masculine face.

A breeze stole delicately through my open window and ruffled my hair, luring my eyes to the out-of-door world where young Summer goes walking today, clad in blue and green. Not far off, the hills which give our town its pretty name, rise mistily, like altars. Just beyond that tall tangle of oak trees, a little river comes singing from its source. In winter I miss its friendly voice, yet I am more in sympathy with it then, for ice-bound, its bright limbs fettered, its dancing stilled, it seems kin to such as I. But for me there will never dawn a springtide, with the prison keys in her green girdle and rosy hands outstretched to unlock the door.

Year in, year out, my bed is always close to the windows. All of out-doors that I may see and hear, I must have for my own. I love every glimpse and scent and sound of it. Only the aggressive shriek of the train at the distant crossing makes me shrink and shudder. That was the last thing I heard — a whistle at a crossing — before the day coach which was carrying me home from a happy visit plunged over the embankment.

Eleven years ago! It seems like many centuries. Yet I remember it as I remember yesterday — that crash before oblivion. I can remember even the thrill of twelve-year old pride in the dignity of that fifty-mile journey, made quite alone. It was the beginning of a longer journey, where the milestones are the years; a journey painful and rebellious, marked with many stations of weariness, and black tunnels of agony; a journey which, despite all the loving care that surrounds me, I must make in isolation of body and spirit. Oh, little blue diary, it is well that I may shut away my moods and my mutiny between your covers! No one in all this house must be made sadder because of me. Not father, unfailing playmate, and tender; not Sarah, whose silent affection is like protecting arms about me. There's a great shaft of sunlight quivering across what I've just written. Incongruous, somehow. And I'm out of tune with the June weather and the birds just beyond my windows.

I must ask Sarah to bring me my first rose from my Sleeping Beauty bush. First roses are always the sweetest — like the kiss of Prince Charming.

I wonder what the nervous doctor's name is — poor Sarah!

June paid me a visit this afternoon while I slept. She was reluctant to waken me, but left me her prettiest card. The first roses from my bush! They have been happily translated to a vase beside me, as I write. Father brought them upstairs with him when he came in for tea.

"Did you kiss her hands and tell her how sorry I would be to miss her?" I asked him soberly.

Father looked alarmed.

"Whose hands?" he began.

"Who has called on us today?"

"Mrs. Withers!" he answered, suppressing a groan.

Rudely I laughed.

"Surely, Mavis," father continued plaintively, "you could never demand that I kiss —"

I laughed again. Mrs. Withers — ugly name, isn't it! — is the wife of our pastor. She is a good woman, but she possesses little charm.

I just touched my roses, with a cautious finger-tip.

"June has been here, you prosaic person," I said. "Witness these, and then deny it if you can."

Father, relieved, leaned back in my comfortable arm-chair. At least, I know it *looks* comfortable.

"I did not see her," he said. "That is, not until I entered this room, and found her wearing my daughter's most becoming face."

Father is so satisfactory! I'm sure I bridled.

"Bring me a mirror, immediately!" I demanded.

Father rose obediently to his lean height, and fumbled among the things on my dresser for the fat silver mirror, adorned with its charmingly ugly cupids, which had been my mother's.

"There, Miss Vanity!" he said. And while I studied my reflection, he studied me from under his bushy brows.

Finally, in silence, I gave him back the glass.

"Well?" asked father.

"Well?" I responded, which was not courteous.

"Do you find yourself prettier than yesterday?"

"Oh! Much!" I answered, with conviction.

After all, there are compensations in the possession

of a pointed face, decorated with big dark eyes, and a delightful mouth. My nose has never pleased me; but always, when I am gloomiest, my hair affords me consolation. Sarah makes a household pet of it, and cares for it devotedly. There's heaps of it. So much, that it makes my head ache to wear it piled high. So it generally lies in two long braids across the sheets.

"Father," I asked, "what color is my hair?"

He leaned forward and lifted one of the braids.

"Exactly the color of cloudy amber," he answered.

I pondered on this for a time, and then: "That," I said, "sounds very nice — but improbable."

We smiled at one another, but suddenly the laughter left his eyes, and he bent to kiss my forehead, perhaps to hide his face.

"You grow more lovely every day, Mavis," he said, gravely.

Could anything be sweeter than a father who says all those little, lover things to one? I think not.

I laid my cheek against his hand. He has nice hands, quick to soothe and caress. Nothing is quite unendurable with father near.

"You should be a poet," I told him. "Sometimes I think you are, instead of a historian. Nothing in the world can ever make me believe that you write deadly-dull books for deadly-dull people to read. Do they read them?" I inquired as an afterthought.

"Mavis!" he shook his finger at me, in mock indignation.

"Well," I answered truthfully, "mediaeval history must be dull. I'm sure I can't remember any of it!"

Here our argument, but half commenced, ceased. For

father, with an exclamation, plunged his hands deep into his pockets, and after a time produced a slim, sober volume.

"Here it is!" he cried in triumph.

"Here is what?" I asked in some astonishment. "How you do dash about, father. Your mind turns all sorts of corners. What is it — mediaeval history?"

"Certainly not, minx! Poetry!"

"Poetry!"

He laid the book on the bed, and my hands pounced upon it like two white cats on a small brown mouse.

"I've been starving for some!" I announced, and turned the book over to read the title, *The Lyric Hour by Richard Warren.*

"Where," I asked, tucking my treasure under my pillow, "did you get it?"

"It came in the morning mail," he answered.

I looked at him searchingly.

"There is," I ventured, "some mystery about this *Lyric Hour.*"

Father laughed, and fished once more in his pockets.

"Here is the letter which came with it," he said.

I opened the envelope, which bore the name of father's publisher and good friend, and read:

New York City
June 18th

Dear Carroll:

I'm sending you your delayed proofs, and by way of apology and distraction, the volume of verse which has created such a sensation in literary and critical circles — those two kingdoms which occasionally overlap — but are not always completely allied. I feel certain that you and

Mavis will enjoy Richard Warren. Old and sedate as I have grown with the years, I must confess that he has made my pulses quicken and my heart take on something of its youth again.

With warmest remembrances to you both,

Faithfully yours,

JOHN DENTON

"I gave the letter back to father.

"It must be some book!" I remarked with awe, if slangily.

Father raised an eyebrow.

"Why?"

"Mr. Denton — and 'quickened pulses'?" I quoted with a rising inflection.

"Why not?" interrogated my parent. "A contemporary of mine, and, Mavis, you must admit, an admirer of yours —"

I was flattered into silence, and turned my attention to my roses once more. Father chewed his pipe stem — a reprehensible habit — and made an announcement.

"We've had another caller today," he said.

"You're as bad as Sarah for concealing things until the eleventh hour," I reproached him. "Who was it?"

"Denton's nephew."

This, in Green Hill phraseology, really fetched me. Round-eyed, I stared.

"Didn't know he had one!" I said, somewhat aggrieved. "Who is he, and what is he doing here?"

Father stretched out his long legs, preparatory to explanation.

"It's a long story," he said. "Briefly, this is a prodigal nephew. There has been some family feud in the Denton clan, but recently done away with. When the

hatchet was buried, Denton got into touch with his late brother's family, which consists of a wife, and an only son, who is a doctor. He has just recovered from a slight break-down — overwork, I believe. And Denton through me arranged to have him come here to recuperate and at the same time to assist our good friend, McAllister in some of his surgical research."

By this time my mind was putting two and two together and making eight or nine.

"Not Doctor Denton," I asked, "*the* Doctor Denton?"

Father nodded.

"Perhaps —" he began wistfully. But I shook my head.

"Please not!" I said. And he left me with his sentence unspoken. But I knew! We had both read so much of the young surgeon who had effected wonderful cures in cases similar to mine. It had never occurred to either of us, at the time, that he might be of John Denton's family. But I knew that father often wished, out loud, that he might consult with him about me, deploring the fact that he was in Europe. But for a number of years I have begged so hard that no more doctors be let loose to probe and pound me — a process of infinite torture with no results save deeper hopelessness and white nights, that father promised. So I have been left in peace. Lazily, I wondered why father had not told me sooner of his discovery and subsequent arrangement with Doctor Mac. But I had a bad siege of it, a while back, and probably during that very period the matter had come up. Doubtless, when I had finally struggled up again from my depths, father, once more lost to the world among his books, had forgotten.

I lay silent, watching a bird seesaw on the vine which clambers over my window-ledge in friendly fashion.

"Long past your bed-time!" I remarked severely. But it cheeped at me impudently.

I wonder what Doctor Denton looks like. Thin, I fancy, professional, and probably very jumpy. But I cannot condemn his nerves quite as harshly as I know Sarah does. I have had a speaking acquaintance with nerves, myself.

I meant to indulge in *The Lyric Hour* tonight. But my little blue friend has claimed all of my time. I will save Mr. Warren, therefore, for another day. Like icing on a cake. The book lies under my pillow still, barely peeped at. Perhaps I shall sleep better with that Ship of Song beneath my cheek.

Diary, good night!

Twenty-four hours later.

Oh, Diary, I have found him! And I don't know, and care less, whether he is twenty or ninety, fat or thin, married or single! The only thing in all the world which I am sure of at present is that he is mine! For I have him locked up between two vellum doors, from which he shall never escape He's here — and never in all my life has anyone so thoroughly belonged to me. I've the heart and brains and beautiful spirit of him, and all day long his name makes a happy spot in my conscience. *Richard Warren*! *Richard Warren*! I hold the book that he has given to the world between my hands, in reverence. For all that I have hoped, and dreamed, and lived, in my shut-in life; all that I have ever wanted to be; all, that in my secret soul-shrine I have worshipped in God and Nature and Love of Love, is written down here for me to read and make doubly my own. I don't know who or what he is, Diary, in the outside world.

And it doesn't matter. Nothing matters but this one little book to which he has set his name. For everything worth while is here; dust of stars and wine of dreams; essence of youth and joy of living, given word-form. And yet, these are not words so much as they are music, and color, and fragrance. I've just been reading and reading, and now I've laid the book aside, and have been lying here idly, letting broken snatches of purest beauty drift through my mind. And, for the first time I find myself regretting the shade of my eyes, for my new companion sings of "grey eyes as pure as God's first dream of stars." But perhaps it's just that grey lends itself more easily to poetry than common or garden brown.

Diary, I wonder if I have fallen in love with a book! But what a satisfactory state of heart to be in after all! I can banish my lover with so little effort, if ever I am not in the mood for him! I can even cast him into the fire, if he ever bores me! And I am sure that the most lovelorn maiden on earth must have moments when she would envy that faculty! And when I finally relent, as all true lovers must, how simple it has been made for me to buy a new copy of the Beloved!

Good night, "sweet gossip," as the ladies of Shakespeare's time were wont to say. You're such a comfort! And you'll not tell, will you, that Richard Warren and all his words lie once again beneath my pillow?

June 21

It's raining. Silver fingers are tapping at my window pane, and father's morning offering of roses came to me with their darling faces all wet and gleaming. I hated the weather *hard* when I woke up, but in my *Lyric Hour,* which holds so many, many lyric hours for me,

there's a little verse about the rain, which patters through my mind as soothingly as the drops outside. So I've become almost reconciled to a dull day, devoid of visitors, and with Sarah complaining of "rheumatics." I shall begin to grumble about them myself soon, for I'm aware of warnings in my spine which bode no good. I'm too tired to write more, Diary.

July 1

Since last I set pen to your paper, Blue One, I have descended into Sloughs of Despair. Now, emerged again, I take up my story where I left it. A day or so after the last time I talked with you, I had an attack, of the sort which has mercifully been spared me for over a year. It had been coming on, steadily, but I wasn't going to give in to it — oh, no! So, the first intimation which father and Sarah had of its arrival was late one night, when a moan that I had been biting back for an hour tore its way to freedom past my closed lips, and revealed its presence, surprisingly, in the shape of a scream. Sarah came flying to my bed, and hard on her heels, father. They gave me such remedies as are always at hand, and which generally prove friendly. But this time they failed. My Demon had been in abeyance too long, and was reluctant to loosen his clutches. Once made free of my flesh, he would listen to no reason. Presently there came a period of half-consciousness, through which I dimly heard father at the telephone, calling Dr. McAllister's number. I almost smiled, through the creeping faintness, to think how annoyed he would profess himself to be, "called out of bed at this ungodly hour!" and how once arrived, he would toil to help me.

When I opened my eyes again after what seemed years, it was with a vague sense of amazement that Doctor Mac had grown so young since last I had seen him. For he was slim, where once he had been inclined to rotundity, and ruddy-brown where once he had been sparse and grey. Upon my pulse was an unfamiliar hand, and a strange voice, close to me, was saying quietly.

"She's coming round, Mr. Carroll."

Somehow, this calm disposition of me was annoying.

"I'm not," I heard myself contradict weakly.

Two steel-blue eyes, set in a lean face, met mine. It was not a friendly encounter.

"Please don't talk," ordered this new Doctor Mac briefly.

Father laid his hand upon my forehead.

"Is the pain better, dear?" he asked, with that break in his voice which always comes when he knows that I am suffering.

I tried to flash triumph into the blue eyes, and responded, "Yes." Then, as My Demon's jaws took a fresh hold on my spinal column, "Oh — no — !"

There was a low-voiced consultation, and then father said, reassuringly,

"Don't talk, Mavis dear, and lie quiet. Doctor Denton is going to give you something to relieve you."

I felt six years old again, and resentful to find father going over to the enemy. But I was grateful, that, after all, our own dear Doctor Mac had not been metamorphosed into an ogre with icicle eyes. As the tiny, merciful piston went home, I said feebly, with malice aforethought.

"Hello — *Doctor Jumpy*!"

And the last thing I saw before I fell asleep was his

startled face. And in my first half-dreams, I found myself repeating, childishly, "He did jump! He *did*. And I made him!"

And that, Dear Diary, was my informal introduction to the nervous nephew of Mr. John Denton.

CHAPTER II

Doctor Denton came in this morning.

He has been in every day since that horror-night, and we preserve an armed neutrality with one another. I had even grown rather to like him, not for himself so much as for the engaging way his hair grows, and for the sensitive, spatulate fingers of the born surgeon. But after his visit of this morning, my little liking has retreated, as those crocuses which leave warm earth prematurely are sent shuddering into nothingness by the breath of an inimical frost. Here's what happened.

The roses started, and finished it. My room is quite full of them today; everywhere I look is just a blur of color. I think that Earth is particularly lavish this season. When father brought Doctor Denton in, and left us to what he fondly termed a "nice chat," the following conversation ensued.

"Good morning, Miss Carroll!"

"Good morning, Doctor Denton!"

After a few professional inquiries as to the state of health in which the morning had found me, and my satisfactory answers,— silence! I watched him stride restlessly about my room, until I could stand it no longer. Then I said briefly,

"Lovely day, isn't it?"

Came a growl, which translated I took to signify, "Hot!"

I know now just how water feels, trying to wear away

the proverbial stone. Exhausted by my efforts, I leaned back among my pillows and closed my eyes.

Presently Doctor Denton came, and drew a chair close to the bed.

"Your roses are wonderful," he remarked conversationally.

Here was a subject on which I cannot fail to become eloquent. I opened my eyes. This was a mistake, for in so doing I met that steel-blue glance which always disconcerts me.

"They are," I said, and let the opening pass.

"I'd like to see some there," he continued, very rudely pointing his finger at my face.

I put my hands hastily to my cheeks.

"Now," he announced with satisfaction, "that's more like!"

Diary, it *was* stupid of me to blush!

"You do not admire pallor?" I asked politely.

"Certainly not the pallor of ill-health," was the professional answer. "It may be poetic, but it is hardly — practical."

"You do not admire poetry?"

Doctor Denton ceased twirling one of my loveliest roses between his fingers, and leaned forward to lay it carefully across my nearest braid. Gravely considering the effect, he replied,

"Not as a steady diet."

I slipped my hand under my pillow and closed it down hard over a certain volume.

"I do not suppose that surgery and poetry are particularly compatible," I volunteered, with indifference.

He lifted the rose from my braid and regarded it silently. When he looked up, I was astonished to see

a light in the Alaskan eyes which I never dreamed could live in so cold a climate.

"You're all wrong," he answered; "there's a tremendous amount of poetry in surgery,— beauty, too, and limitless romance."

I didn't know those words were in his vocabulary. A trifle stirred by his tone, I made a little *moue* of scepticism.

"Instruments — and white coats — and ether," I was beginning, when he interrupted me.

"And beyond them all," he finished, on a deeper note, "the poetry of healing!"

I fell silent. Somehow that view of things had never occurred to me. Where one might see poetry, I saw only pain.

Perhaps my face showed something of what I was remembering, for suddenly he rose and leaned over me.

"Let me make you more comfortable," he suggested. And slipping a steady arm beneath my shoulders — there's more strength concealed in the slim length of him than one would imagine — he held me closely, while with the other hand he pounded my pillows and settled them firmly again. Something slid to the floor and lay there.

"Oh!" I said, as he stooped to recover it.

I put out my hands, but he was turning the book over.

"Poetry?" he said pleasantly, and raised an eyebrow. I didn't care much for his tone.

"Have you read it?" I asked belligerently.

"*The Lyric Hour*? No. Do you care, then, so much for rhymesters?"

"For this one," I answered, annoyed to confession.

"That explains it!"

"Explains what?"

"The night you were ill," Doctor Denton went on calmly to reveal, "you called me 'Richard.'"

I felt the hot color rise to my cheeks again. "Well?"

"Nothing. Only — my name happens to be Bill."

"It would be," I remarked.

"Just what do you mean by that, Miss Carroll?"

But I only smiled angelically, and asked, "When do you expect Doctor McAllister back again, Doctor Denton?"

I do not know that my tone implied all that I felt, but I saw the steel-blue eyes grow very dark, and,

"Thank you!" said Doctor Denton stiffly.

I felt somewhat ashamed, and tried to make amends.

"Please read *The Lyric Hour*, Doctor," I urged, in my prettiest party voice. "You will find it really worth while."

The creature is, after all, occasionally understanding. He smiled forgivingly at me and held out his hand for the book. But I hadn't meant that.

"Oh!" I said, hastily. "Not my copy!"

"As precious as all that?" he asked, putting his rejected hand in his pocket.

This I ignored.

"Tell Mr. John Denton to send you out a copy," I suggested. "He sent us this one."

"The devil he did!"

I looked my surprise, and my visitor laughed. He has a very nice laugh, considering.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Carroll. I am apt to be a trifle —," he paused, and considered me narrowly, "eh — jumpy. And I didn't know my Uncle John went in for ethereal chaps."

Ethereal! The word, on those lips, was an insult! I

glared at him, rather conscious that I must look like a sick kitten.

Father came in, providentially.

"How is she, Doctor?" he asked. Which was absurd, as I had reassured him concerning my welfare not two hours earlier.

"Rather scrappy — lots of fight left," answered our guest, rising.

I was speechless.

"I think," said Doctor Denton, "we shall have to get her out of doors."

Father and I stared at him.

"Why not?" he continued, looking from one of us to the other. "We'll commence by building her up a bit, and trying massage for those unused muscles. Then a little later it should be quite easy to carry her comfortably downstairs and settle her on a cot under the trees for a little while each day."

"McAllister —" began father, doubtfully.

"Oh, I'll talk with him," cut in Doctor Denton cheerfully. He will be back next week," he added, turning deliberately to me.

I looked grateful.

"How perfectly splendid!" I said, with a ring of real enthusiasm in my voice. "I've missed him so much!"

Father looked mildly surprised at so much fervor, and I am sure the creature concealed a smile.

As he departed with father to "talk things over," Doctor Denton turned at the door.

"Less poetry, Miss Carroll," he admonished, parentally.

"That's what I tell her," said father, surrendering to the foe. "The child reads too much. It makes her fanciful and —"

"Doesn't take her mind off herself," suggested the doctor, nastily. I wonder, Diary, what he meant?

"We'll take away her books," he went on, "and give her sunshine and fresh air and green trees, in their place."

Against my will I admitted it would be glorious — the outdoors part of the program.

"You see," he turned to father, "doctors are rather like gardeners. I, for one, am interested in roses."

"Roses?" echoed my parent, who seemed to pass from one stage of astonishment to the other as the morning progressed.

"Roses!" repeated Doctor Denton, firmly. "There's a particularly pretty white one that I am anxious to cultivate. I believe with care and sunlight it could be urged to bloom quite deep pink — permanently." He looked at me as he said this last. Then, with a polite "Good morning, Miss Carroll!" he left the room.

I hate him!

But Diary, wouldn't it be altogether wonderful if we could be taken out-of-doors together?

I wonder what that doctor person did with the flower he stole from my vase?

GREEN HILL
July 3

Diary, I dreamed a horrid dream last night. I dreamed that I stood with Richard Warren on some high wooded place — in my dreams, Diary, I can always stand — with my hands close in his. I couldn't see his face, but I knew him, somehow, and his voice was in my ears, just saying my name, over and over. "*Mavis*! *Mavis*!" But as the mist cleared before my eyes, someone said far off, "Ethereal!" and laughed. And as I looked, I saw,

not Richard Warren, Poet and Dreamer of Dreams, but William Denton, Surgeon and Scoffer. It all sounds so foolish, Diary, written down, but it was really quite dreadful. Sarah, who must have heard me call out, for in my dream I wrenched my hands away and screamed, appeared at my bedside, like a familiar ghost. How I welcomed her, innumerable tightly plaited braids, and all! Breathe it not in Gath, but in this unpleasant fashion does Sarah achieve her crinkled morning coiffure! She tucked me in, secured a flapping shade, forced a potion of hot milk down my unwilling throat, and left me. So, finally, I slept again, to dream no more.

This morning a note came to me from Mr. Denton. So nice a man to have so wretched a relation!

New York City
July 2d

My dear little Mavis:

Your good father is so poor a correspondent that I have struck his name from my letter-list. But you are always considerate of a lonely old man. Therefore I write to inform him, through you, that I am leaving this asphalt wilderness presently, for the White Mountains. Perhaps when my vacation there draws to a close, I may drop down to see you before returning to the 'demnition' grind. I shall look forward to a pleasant visit with you, and a quarrelsome time with your father, to whom, despite his neglect of me, I beg to be remembered.

I am sending you some books and some exotic fruit, hoping to tempt your literary and physical palates, respectively.

My nephew writes me that he has seen you. I envy him! But I am more than sorry, my dear, that your first encounter should have taken place under such unfortunate circumstances. I shall be grateful to you for any kindness

you care to show him, for he has not had a very happy, albeit successful, career, and he is far from his Western home and his people.

Remember me to your elderly and amiable handmaiden, whose beaten biscuit I recall with such felicity.

Write me now and then, Mavis, and if I can in any way be of service to you, you have but to command me.

Faithfully and affectionately your friend,

JOHN DENTON

P.S. How did you like *The Lyric Hour*?

This afternoon the fruit and books arrived. Quantities of both. Sammy Simpson, Jr., who adds the arduous duties of expressman to those of milk purveyor, staggered upstairs under the burden of them. Into this very room, with his own hands, ably chaperoned by Sarah, he brought them. We had a little conversation. It ran something like this.

Mavis: "Good afternoon, Sammy!"

Sammy: "Afternoon, Miss Mavis!"

M——: "How is everyone at home, Sammy?"

S——: "Pretty fair, thank you."

M——: "Anything exciting happen in Green Hill lately, Sammy?"

S——: "Nothin' in perticular, Miss Mavis."

Here Sarah made a remark.

"Why, Sammy, you told me yourself, not ten minutes back, that your folks found old man Thomas hanging to the rafters of his own barn this morning!"

Sammy, in deep disgust, "Oh, him!"

Sarah, sharply, "Suppose you think a hanging aint nothing worth mentioning, Sammy!"

To which the youth, defensively,

"Well, it kinder slipped my mind."

"Why, Sammy," I here ejaculated, with real horror, "that's dreadful!"

Sammy shifted to his other foot for a change.

"Yes'm," he remarked. "Paw found him. That's the third man, he continued with satisfaction, "that Paw's cut down. He never did have much luck."

Sarah looked triumphant. I, making a miraculous recovery, inquired,

"I wonder why he did such a thing — Mr. Thomas, I mean?"

"Wife druv him," volunteered Sammy cheerfully.

I tried to appear shocked, but Sarah answered with bitterness,

"Couldn't stand living with himself any longer, like as not."

But Sammy, ignoring her, turned to me and said with conviction,

"Wimmen, Miss Mavis, is the dickens!"

Here the conversation ended. Sammy departed with a tug of his tow forelock, doubtless a legacy from ancestors who now sleep quietly across the ocean. Sarah bustled him out of the room, as one shoos chickens, and I lay back on my pillows and laughed. There is more to Sammy's melancholy than meets the eye. I seem to see Rosie Allan's fine Yankee hand in this. However, sooner or later I shall solve the mystery, for all Green Hill comes, now and again, to this peaceful room.

I've peeped into my new books, and nibbled at something which starts out by acting like a peach and ends up by becoming an apricot. And now I will write to my Fairy Godfather. For I have a Great Idea, Diary, which I will not confide to you until it has taken shape.

GREEN HILL
July 4

We've been celebrating today! Even unto firecrackers under my window — I am only grateful that they were not under my bed! Doctor Denton, who arrived this morning with Doctor Mac in tow, unbent sufficiently to present me with a small silk flag. I was coldly sweet to him, but warmly so to his companion. It's nice to have Doctor Mac at home — language, beetle-brows, and all! He was led into the room by his younger colleague, and brought to my bedside, with an air of "Eureka! Behold my handiwork!"

Doctor Mac is very much pleased with my appearance — from a medical standpoint — and before the two of them departed, it was practically settled that I should begin the massage so that the out-of-doors campaign might be started.

I informed Doctor Denton that I had a letter from his uncle, to which he remarked.

"Didn't know you corresponded!"

Curiously enough, the news appeared to annoy him.

Diary, here is the letter which went to the White Mountains today. May your covers turn red if ever you divulge it!

GREEN HILL
July 4th

Dear Mr. Denton:

First of all, a thousand thanks for your letter, the books, and the fruit. But how can you prate of 'fruit' in so commonplace a fashion, and then shower me with works of art, full of delicious mystery? Sarah says she fears I shall never be satisfied with Green Hill fare again. I believe she has grounds. The books are most welcome. I've been peering

at Wells, and peeking at Bennett, and holding my breath over the Barrie plays. I shall gorge myself on the printed page during the next few weeks. The dearest of all is an old friend who comes to me in a new dress. How in the world did you remember my passion for *Alice,* and her unchanging *Wonderland*? My own copy is worn and dog-eared. But this *Alice* is fresh and smiling — the illustrations are too quaint — and I love her already. Thanks, and again, thanks!

Yes, Doctor Denton has become a frequent visitor at the Carroll Cottage. Father likes him very much and they have lengthy arguments in the study, evenings. Sometimes a detached word or the scent of a pipe drifts up to me through the open door, and, occasionally, the two come and sit with me awhile. It was a great surprise to me to discover your nephew in our new doctor. One would never dream that you belonged together.

I am sure that father is glad to have some one to play with. There is no question of being 'kind.' At all events, Doctor Denton does not appear to me a lonely person. On the contrary.

The Lyric Hour and I are intimates. I have never had a book mean so much to me, not even *Alice,* who keeps me alive. I wonder if you know the author of these exquisite verses? Please, if you do, do not tell me anything about him, but — do you think I might write to him? I should like to tell him of the pleasure he has given me, and I should like to tell him through you. I'd rather he did not know my name. This may sound very foolish, as I know that writers have many letters from the public, but we shut-in people have moods. I would love to get to know him a little, on paper. Do you think he would mind? Somehow, from his book, I feel he might understand.

Father wouldn't care, I am sure. The Queen can do no wrong! So if you have no objection to playing postman, nothing remains for me save to select a new pen and commence my letter. But I will not do that until I hear from you.

All in this house send love, except Sarah, who, I am sure, would not think it quite proper. But she would tender her respectful regards to you, did she know I was writing.

Gratefully and affectionately,

MAVIS CARROLL

And now, Diary, I have set the wheels revolving and what the next White Mountain post will bring forth, I know not.

GREEN HILL
July 5

Diary, I am afflicted with the morning-after sensation. I wish I had not written to Mr. Denton. What will he think of me? And yet, it seems almost justifiable, after all. For surely I am quite bed-ridden enough not to have my impulses questioned or to be accused of a sentimental, ulterior motive. And it is certainly patent to the most out-and-out sceptic that I shall have to get all my Romance vicariously.

It's a nice day. Peter-who-lives-next-door came in this morning to display an infinitesimal, bandaged thumb. He "sat on a firecracker," he said, which seems to have had an odd reaction. Peter has been so busy growing up of late that every time he hurtles into my quiet room I am convinced that I can see him sprout. He has a cupboard love for Sarah, but I think that his affection for me is simon-pure. Little boys are awfully dear. I have a proprietary interest in Peter. The night he was born I watched the lights of the house next door until my eyes closed of themselves. And ever since he was a round, big-eyed baby, he has had the freedom of this house. Today, he sat upon my bed and informed me that he was "goin' visitin'." I gather that his mother, Mrs. Goodrich, has a school friend who is spending the summer

some forty miles away, at a small hotel. I asked Peter if he were eager to go.

"And leave me?" I asked plaintively.

"I'll be home soon," answered Peter, evasively. "An' Aunt Lily's awful nice — but awful old — as old as Mother," added the ungallant child.

Peter is seven. His pretty mother is twenty-eight!

I envy Mrs. Goodrich very much. I envy her Peter with a passion almost pain; and now I find myself envying her a school friend! Girls, young women, are almost as strange to me as men. Those I know in Green Hill are charming creatures and very sweet to me. They come to me with their knitting, their sewing, their love affairs. But a community of interests is not ours. As they chatter on, I can only wonder wistfully what it must be like to golf and swim, ride and play tennis, picnic and dance; to do all the "every day" things which they take so much for granted.

Dr. Denton came in today to see how I had recovered from "the Fourth," and, his call coinciding with the tail-end of Peter's visit, the two, who had hitherto had but a "bowing acquaintance," as the doctor put it, became instantly the best of friends. I wish I liked John Denton's nephew better. I am forced to agree with father that he has many splendid qualities. But only my mind agrees. Once or twice, when father has been particularly expansive on the subject, I have caught him looking at me in a puzzled fashion, and have realized that my tone has been about as enthusiastic as a Yale adherent when Harvard is making a goal. (Yes, Diary, I read the papers and ask quite intelligent questions!) When Dr. Denton is the subject in question between my father and me I am polite, very just, but unemotional. He arouses

in me a feeling of rebellion and plain "cussedness." Perhaps it is a case of "Dr. Fell." I do not know, for until recently Dr. Fell has always seemed a rather maligned and misunderstood character to me. But not now. And yet, digging further in the soil of spontaneous antagonism, I am forced to confess that my dislike is deeper and even more illogically rooted. It is not pleasant to meet a strange young man, when one is flat on one's ridiculous back, with no personality other than the ugly, ignominious one of pain.

Let us be frank, Diary. I am irritated to be looked upon as an "interesting case." It hurts my pride, it wounds my vanity, it affronts me. This is not a pretty confession, but, after all, was I not intended for other uses than that one? It is small comfort to consider that my "history" is tabulated and filed in many an imposing medical office, and that one misguided wretch once wrote an article about me for the *Medical World*.

Other girls have pleasanter publicity to look back upon; thrilling scrap-books of clippings from local papers, little prosaic bits of paper that despite the bored phraseology of a reporter are just so many shining feathers from the wings of Romance. They run something like this: "Miss Ella Smith has returned to college." "Miss Ella Smith was the hostess at a very charming dinner dance last evening in her residence on Elm Avenue. This affair, which marked the debut of one of Green Hill's most popular members of the younger set, was etc., etc." "The announcement of the engagement of Miss Ella Smith to Howard Anderson, son of the president of the Washington Park Bank, was made yesterday at a luncheon given for Miss Ella Smith by Mrs. Arthur Jones." And then, Diary, after half a column for the wedding and

the "Voice that Breathed o'er Eden" accompaniment, perhaps some day, this: "Born, to Mr. and Mrs. Howard Anderson (née Ella Smith), a son, Howard Anderson, Junior."

And after that, of course, the white-bound *Baby Book*. My mother kept one of me. Absurd pictures are in it, a lock of yellow hair, and all sorts of dear, foolish comments. Even my first word is written there, with, I know, a vainglorious pen. The word is not startling. It is "birdie." Father has often told me that mother declared this initial effort of speech a direct sign of abnormal brilliancy on my part, as the dictionary meaning of my christian name is "European song thrush or throstle."

I wonder if even a throstle would not get out of tune were it sentenced to life-long captivity?

I am terribly restless of late. I think that both father and Sarah have noticed it. But they have said nothing. In winter, I lie almost dormant, but Spring breeds a fever in my blood, and Summer sets me frantic with the longing to be up and out and away. But of all the hours, I love the one, toward twilight, before sunset, when the light is long and level, and a mellow golden. A breeze springs up and whispers gently in the trees, and I come nearest of all then to a sense of peace and quietude. This hour is, I think, of all summer hours the one most significant of her. In winter, one does not find the day entering imperceptibly into that period of lovely transition; in winter, one has daylight and then darkness.

Bedtime, Diary. The stars are thick tonight, and I can see the fireflies on the grass below my window, in pretty competition with the high, still light in the sky. Good-night! If I have been cross and rebellious in this writing, forgive me. It's only in books that a shut-in is

angelic all the time! And even if I do write down my revolts and teacup revolutions in a book, I am still very far from being a heroine!

I wonder — will Mr. Denton consent to the alien role of go-between and accomplice?

CHAPTER III

SOME LETTERS

WOODLAND HOUSE
SUMMIT, N. H.

Dear little Mavis:

Of course I know Richard Warren. He is a very nice person to know! And he will be more than glad to hear from you, I am sure. By all means write to him. I wish I were twenty-odd and a Poet, instead of fifty-even and a Publisher! However, I shall take the second best, and play go-between.

Whenever you wish, I will further your schemes and preserve your incognito, you Designing Person!

Affectionately
JOHN DENTON

July 6th

FROM A ROSE-GREY
BOWER
July 7th

To you —
A Maker of Songs:

With your *Lyric Hour* close beside me, and a picture of you in my imagination, I can feel little hesitancy in writing to tell you, as best I can, all that your poems have meant to me. I am, briefly, a "shut-in," in whose whole limited life books must necessarily play a greater part than in the active world of the well person.

Not long since, through Mr. John Denton, your verses came to me. Straight into my hands they came, and from

there into my heart. They are singing there now. And for this, my little note carries you real gratitude. It must go to you, however, without name or sign. I'd rather that you stayed a little "unreal." For when names and addresses begin to play their part, then convention steps in to lay forbidding hands on the lips of friendly impulse,— even here in my castle, from which the outside world is almost banished, and which I shall never leave.

Thank you more than I can say for the loveliness of your songs.

Very sincerely yours,
ONE DISTANT READER

NEW YORK CITY
July 12th

Dear Stranger-Lady:

I have your letter and have asked our mutual friend to forward my reply to you. I am so glad that you did not allow Mrs. Grundy to enter that rose-grey bower of yours, which sounds so attractive. I am sure she would find the color scheme most unbecoming!

I am so glad that you care for my book. It is my first, and I have a weakness for it. I am afraid I do not sing for the many, but for the few. Time was, when I had hoped to be minstrel for all the world, but that is past now. And I am content with what I do, if it can call forth letters like yours.

Will you not write me again, and tell me as much of yourself as you care to? Or am I asking too much? I hope not, for your letter has given me such pleasure. It has made a little happy spot for me along the way, an oasis in that Desert of Loneliness which all of us know so well.

It is hard to think of you as really "shut-in." Somehow, I make a different mental picture of you.

If you will let me write to you, you will have to bear with hearing me tell of my dreams. But I am sure you could

not treat them other than gently. And perhaps we can make for each other a little rendezvous of pen and ink, where we may meet and talk awhile.

Yours very gratefully,
RICHARD WARREN

FROM A SECLUDED SPOT
July 14th

Dear and Friendly Unknown:

Thank you for your letter. I shall be glad to share my quiet days with you.

You ask me about myself.

Well, first of all, there's Father; and second, there is Sarah. In order to rightly visualize Father, you must imagine all the strength and gentleness in the world, made man. And to be truly aware of Sarah, you must picture an aging fairy, who brings you just what you want on trays and things, before you know you want them; who creeps in to tuck you up before you realize you are about to grow chilly. Father is big and grey and brown; Sarah is like New England, just before spring; very reticent, and most tender beneath a wintry exterior. She has been nurse and servant, mother and friend to me, since that day when, after the doctors had agreed that there was no open door through which I might escape into health again, they brought me back here to live out the rest of my life. And of course no category would be complete without a mention of Peter, who is quite the most delightful lover that ever a girl could have.

Then there's our cottage, a small red edifice, rather weather-beaten. It is close to the hills; I think that they care for it, in so friendly a manner do they regard its very windows. In spring it is very intimate with the apple blossoms, which toss rosy sprays into the crystal air to break about its feet. In summer, as now, the roses pour white

and red and golden wine on the doorstep. In autumn, the gayest leaves come drifting by to settle on the verandah, and even the snow seems to like it, so high and white does it heap itself about the doors.

Inside, the very best of the house is in my room. Father calls it the "Heart of the Home." If it is that, it beats in grey and rose, and lovely old blue. Grey in the walls and floor, and rose and blue in the cretonnes of curtains and mahogany furniture. All day long I lie in a four-poster bed, which belonged to a great, great, grandmamma, and is stationed in a big bay-window. I can look out over the hills, which in fancy I am always climbing. Many people come to see me here. They bring me their troubles and their joys, and I suffer and am glad with them, vicariously. One by one you shall r eet them as our correspondence continues. For indeed, I hope it will. But with just one condition. Never by hook or crook or dark wiles, must you procure my name from our "postman." For then the spell will break, and I will vanish like the apparitions in the fairy stories.

That blot is where I stopped to look at an absurd cow which wandered slowly across my line of vision, over the road and into the orchard. Such an amusing and defiant tail! So melancholy an eye!

It has been raining this morning, and now there is palest sunlight through veils of mist. Somewhere, a bird is being very happy about something. Through an open window comes the fragrance of growing, rain-wet things. Surely you, city-bound, miss half of life.

I hear Sarah approaching. That means luncheon. So I must leave you, Poet. This is such a charming game, solitaire with an unseen partner, that I am loath to lay aside the cards.

Poet, good afternoon!

Yours loquaciously,

Me

New York City
July 19th

Enchanted Princess:

Your letters travel so long a route to reach me that I tremble lest sometime they should grow weary and stop off permanently, on the way. Will you not send them direct to the Yale Club? I am in and out of town all week, and will always go there for my mail. I, of course, shall have to stick to the White Mountain itinerary. But your word is law.

I was very glad to hear about the King and the Lady-in-Waiting and the Castle. Yet it is yourself I want a pen-sketch of. On second thoughts, perhaps, unconsciously, you are making it for me.

I live — but no, it would never do to tell you! I shall have to move in order to provide a poet with a less prosaic setting. I am desolate in having no Sarah to anticipate my wants; and — no Father. However, tucked away, where no one can steal her from me, I possess a Mother! A mother with tiny hands and feet, and the prettiest red hair in the world. This is too bewildering a shade for a Mother's hair to flaunt! She has added charm to beauty by acquiring somewhere merry blue eyes, with an Irish twinkle in them. And a kindly angel has set these jewels deftly in the sweetest face. You would love her, I know, and I am generously willing to share her with you if in return I may claim a bit of your Father. Between us we could manage to own a perfectly good pair of parents, couldn't we?

But for the sake of my peace of mind, will you translate, interpret, or explain "Peter" to me?

Do tell me about your visitors! Do they come to see you — I beg your pardon! I mean, do gallant knights ever gallop up to the drawbridge on coal-black chargers, and blow lustily on a silver trumpet, at the postern gate — whatever that is! — for admission? And does a certain

lady ever graciously bid her varlets give them entrance? Tell me this, and what you read, and what you think. And if you will whisper to me, just how many years have left you lovelier than the year before, I will confess to you that I am Way-Past-Thirty!

Yours,

RICHARD WARREN

THE CASTLE
July 26th

Dear Merlin:

He was an aged wizard, you know.

Your letter has been here for several days, but I have not been very well. Now I'm all-better, and the answer goes to you.

First of all, you may indeed have a small interest in Father. This is how much you tempt me with your description of your Mother. Will you give her my love? Mother must be a very precious person. Mine I can hardly remember. But I know she was sweet and good and beautiful. It doesn't seem possible that anyone's mother could be anything else. My Mother was very young when she died, and although the lack of her is sometimes very hard to bear, I am grateful always that her eyes closed on the sight of me, sturdy, laughing, sound! Not as I am now, a bit of human wreckage. I wonder if she knows? There are moments before dawn when I seem to feel her lean over me, and her tears are on my face. But I know that God is merciful, and because of this I think the Dear Dead may not see us. Else, how were it Heaven?

Is it very hard to be Way-Past-Thirty? I am twenty-three — a great old age, if one stops to consider it.

Of course I have "Gentlemen Guests"! I am not too old for that! There's Father, every day; and occasionally Sammy Simpson. Then there is Peter, who lives next door. He would be flattered at your interest. Peter is seven,

and the proud possessor of a place where teeth once were. I regret to state that he employs this aperture for an immortal, if not conventional purpose. "It is quite easy," he once earnestly confided to me, "once you get the nick of it!" Peter, his mother, and his baby sister, are away on a visit, and I miss my little friend.

I suppose my doctor comes under the category of Male Visitor. He is sixty, very crusty, but human and dear. There's another Medical Person, too. But he doesn't count.

Good-by for a little, Merlin,

Yours,

THE PRINCESS

NEW YORK CTY
July 29th

Your Royal Delightfulness:

I am so sorry you've not been well. I can't bear to think that you should suffer pain. What plucky creatures women are! I wonder that they are created from the same clay as great, blundering, hulks of masculinity!

When my letter remained so long unanswered, I began to fear that it had never experienced the joy of coming to you. I began to worry lest I had offended and alienated you. Indeed, Princess, I began to think all manner of dreadful things! This must never happen again, for I am sure I have a brand-new crop of grey hair! Mind now!

Your visiting list is interesting. Sammy Simpson I approve, if only for the euphony of his name. Peter, and your grouchy physician, have charm. But who is the doctor who 'does not count'? I am always suspicious of a man when a girl says so venomous a thing about him! Do tell me! Doctors are all very well, in their way, and sometimes I think we songsters try to doctor, too, just a bit. It is of course not healing of broken bones, of wounds and fevers, that we try to bring the world, but of broken hearts, and the wounds of every day, of fevers of too much earth

and restlessness. I do not suppose we can hope to cure, but perhaps we can provide, occasionally, a draught which drugs for a little into Forgetfulness.

No, Princess, I do not think that the Dead can see us. At least, not with the eyes of earth. But they watch over us, perhaps, with a clearer sight than we may know, and see beyond today and beyond the flesh, and are content, knowing with God that all things work toward eventual Good.

Now that we have brought the family into it, please remember me admiringly to your father.

Yours,

RICHARD WARREN

THE CASTLE
July 31st

Dear Minstrel Man:

Please, do you love *Alice*? I have been spending such a pleasant hour with her. Peter, returned from his travels, arrived this morning with my breakfast tray, and your letter. After we had exhausted the raptures of welcome, and Peter, his enunciation somewhat impaired by toast, had told me all there is to know about 'Auntie Perkins,' 'Uncle Perkins,' and the 'Fat Boarder,' he demanded a 'story.' So, as my own inventive faculties seem a little out of repair,—I took him with me, a willing captive, to the Rabbit Hole, and beyond. Yes, I am sure you love *Alice*, Poet. No Poet could be entirely grown-up. I wish you could see my new edition of the House where she lives. It is charming, and came to me from our Fairy-Godfather-Postman.

Last night I saw a shooting star. I suppose it was heralding August, the month of these flying flames. As a child I alway thought that the Angels were shoeing the horses which drew the chariot of the sun, and that these were stray sparks from the Heavenly Anvil. I do not know that I was so very wrong, after all! Everything beautiful

must be a spark of the Plan which is being forged in that Divine Smithy.

Do you wish on shooting stars? I do! Always the same wish. All my life, I've played at just such silly games. Perhaps we all of us do in different ways. A thousand years ago, when a certain great poet was a child, did ever he refrain from stepping on cracks, as he went whistling to school? If one is careful, you know, and reaches one's destination in triumph, it may mean much. A new hair-ribbon, absolution for a tiny sin, rice pudding for supper. But perhaps you were never naughty. I am sure you didn't wear hair-ribbons, and — but this is hard to believe — possibly you don't like rice pudding! You couldn't resist Sarah's, I am sure!

I — I wish on hay wagons. I adore odd numbers. Particularly do I revel in thirteen. At the same time, my defiance ends there. I cannot spill salt without a shudder, and first stars and baby moons are burdened with my desires. I am sure that every wish would come true, and the veriest pebble turn an infallible talisman in my hand, if only I believed enough.

There's a sunset behaving riotously outside. I am sure that it appears much more sedate in New York!

Whimsically yours,

H. R. H. Me

P.S. I forgot to answer your questions about the Other Doctor. He is thirty-two, rather tall, and most particularly exasperating.

M.

New York City
August 4th

Dear Princess:

If Denton may send you books, so may I. In this mail three friends of mine go to you: *A Romance of the Nursery, Paul and Fiametta,* and Grahame's *Golden Age.* Please

be kind to them. I rather think you must be like Fiametta, — a slim, brown child, with oval face, and curious, parti-colored hair dark as the oak-settle in the hall — that the sunshine burnished into brightness.

I dreamed of you last night, an adventurous dream. Some day I will write you about it. Not now!

With the books I am sending you a talisman. I hope it will bring you all you wish. Of course, I do not know, but I have told it to try. There is a secret hidden at its heart. But I do not believe that you can find it out all by yourself. That would take a Poet! Now write me, and tell me how egotistical I am! But remember, after all, I am nothing more or less than Mere Man.

I hope you will care for your added charm, for the books, and a little for

Your friend,
RICHARD WARREN

NEW YORK CITY
August 7th

Dear Lady:

Have I in any way offended you? I have had no word from you since the 31st. I am praying that you are not angry because I allowed myself the selfish pleasure of adding to your library. Or is it the talisman? I hope not! You see, it was not just a purchased thing. It belonged to my father.

But I would far rather than you were vexed with me than too ill to write.

Anxiously,
RICHARD WARREN

THE CASTLE
August 7th

How very rude you must think me, dear friend! For several days have passed, and I have not yet thanked you

for the books, and for the curiously carven piece of jade, which you assure me will bring me my heart's desire. It lies close in my left hand as I write. I like the cool touch of it. And what a beautiful color it is, like the very heart of Summer! But you should not have robbed yourself of anything so precious.

The books are delightful. I wonder if one reads one's self into every book! Your choice of friends is faultless. I have fallen desperately in love with "Paul," already. But "Fiametta" and I are not alike. For where she is brown, I am white, and where her face is oval, mine is pointed, and where her hair is oak-and-gold, mine is just yellow-and-brown! And you know perfectly well that I am no longer ten. Except perhaps when Peter urges me to be.

And now I have a Something-Lovely to share with you! Also, it is the main reason why I have not let you hear from me before. In a few days I'm to be carried downstairs — and out under the trees, where an ingenious cot awaits my occupany. For several days I have been preparing. The Disagreeable Doctor insists, and Father and our own Medicine Man aid and abet him. There's been a large Scandinavian Lady here every day. She possesses strong hands and a cloudy accent. And I am informed that she is to be the Witch who will remove certain fetters from my circulation. I have wished on my talisman that she may be successful. You see, I can't be very sanguine about it, for they tried all manner of things of this sort long ago, and to no avail. But, O Poet, if ever I get out under the trees again! Once there, how my spirit will strain at the leash of my body, to be off and away, over the hills!

I've not told you before of our breath-taking plan, lest it not come true!

What did you dream, Poet, and will you not tell me the Secret?

Gratefully yours,
AN IMPATIENT INVALID

P.S. Paul, Fiametta, Alice, and other of your intimates, wish to be affectionately remembered. And Peter wants to know if you are by chance a Scout. It is the ambition of his life to attain the age of twelve and his modern knighthood.

New York City
August 9th

Kind Princess:

Your letter of the seventh has reached me. It must have crossed mine. I began to feel happier directly I had written. So I must have known that you were writing too! Thank you for absolving me!

Your news is good news indeed! But I must know who is to have the joy of carrying you out into the sunshine, which is your birthright. The Old Unpleasant Doctor? The Young and even More Unpleasant Doctor?

I think perhaps you had better arrange to have your father play magician!

I have had a letter from my mother. There's a message for you in it. Obediently, I quote:

"Please tell the Unknown Lady that I have received her love, and am taking care of it. I wish I could run in to visit with her in that rose-grey room. But it wouldn't do at all! Not with my hair! Tell her she must have it done over in blues and browns before I can put in an appearance. The years, thank God, whatever else they take, still leave me my vanity! Give the Princess my love, and ask her if rose-and-grey bedsocks would become her feet. Size, too, please."

There's more to it, only if I should quote further you'd grow aware how much I have written her about you, and just what I have said. And that would never do. But you can see for yourself how well brought up I am. Confiding

in my maternal parent! Did you know the verses were dedicated to her?

No! I will not tell you my dream, nor what the Talisman is hiding from you. If I did, you would lose all interest, for I should no longer be a Man of Mystery!

Will you tell an egotistical male just which verse most pleases you? And of course you will let me hear directly you leave the Castle?

Yours

RICHARD WARREN

Please congratulate Peter for me on his aspirations. Tell him that although hoary beyond belief, I too have always yearned to be a Scout — a good one!

R. W.

THE CASTLE
August 15th

Monster!

How dare you have secrets? Is that not Woman's prerogative? I will not answer any of your questions today, nor, indeed, write to you at all. Instead, I will write to your Mother:

Yours indifferently,
HER ROYAL HAUGHTINESS

(Enclosure)

Dear Mother of the Poet:

Your son has written me your message. It is lovely of you to understand. And you *do* understand, do you not, just how much this pleasant pen-and-ink friendship means to me in my restricted world, bound as it is by walls, north and south, east and west.

The bedsocks sound beautiful. I have some severe gray ones which always make me feel very plain. But Sarah, who fashioned them, has little imagination. It is dear of

you to want to knit for me, and when the cold nights come, I shall welcome your gift! About size three, I should say.

Mr. Warren writes me that *The Lyric Hour* is dedicated to you. I have turned to the page and read it with new eyes. "To the Dearest of All." And I am sure that the peom which is my favorite is your own. It is the one which begins

> For this, the patience of your Love,
> The pride which gives me wings.
> Dearest, my gratitude . . .

If only I could say it in verse, what a thankful little poem would go to you now! But I can only sign myself,

VERY MUCH YOUR DEBTOR

NEW YORK CITY
August 16th

Cruel Princess!

My head is in the dust! Such an uncomfortable place for it, too! Reluctantly, I have forwarded to my mother the letter which should have been mine. I have read it, every word! Surely that snippy little note, in which you call me — me, a perfect stranger — names! cannot be considered a real letter! On second thoughts, the wildest flight of fancy could never claim that your enclosure was intended for me. However, if I cannot knit, I can write poems for you. There are some on my desk now. But I will not send them to you yet. They are very shy.

How is Peter?

Yours despondently,
RICHARD WARREN

P.S. What little feet you have!

UNDER-THE-TREES
August 22d

Do I not write you from an incredible address, my friend?

Yesterday, the Event took place. It was my Red Letter Day, illuminated with gold. Early in the afternoon, I was carried out of the house, with comparatively little discomfort, on a most ingenious stretcher, by Father and the Very Young Doctor. My dear old Medicine Man was erect in the vanguard, sternly repressing his excitement; while Sarah, visibly jarred out of her usual self, brought up the rear in a flutter of apron strings and ejaculated warnings. We must have made an imposing procession. As long as I live — and I am beginning to hope that it will be for half a century or more — I shall never forget my first sense, after eleven years, of being out in the open. Oh, I've had my windows wide to the four winds, of course, and sunlight across my counterpane and pillows. But how could that be the same? I would have written you, but only one hour of Freedom was granted me. The Family and the Medical Profession had rigged and ready for me, between the two biggest, most friendly trees on the lawn, a comfy and substantial hammock, cushion-flanked. And so, for that hour, I lay and looked and looked, over the hills and across the valleys, and right into our own garden, which riots in bloom these August days. I must confess that the disagreeable and youthful doctor is an understanding person. After the first fifteen minutes had passed in handshaking and congratulations and solicitude, he marshalled my companions and led them away, leaving me alone, in that heavenly air, with the green trees singing all about me. I shall always feel more kindly toward him for that strategic move. But however did the Creature know that even dear Father was a little superfluous?

Will you tell your little Mother of my good fortune? I know you both will be glad for me, but I can't believe anyone can quite grasp my happiness, and my gratitude. Except perhaps, a life prisoner who goes, unexpectedly, free . . .

By the way, I had hardly been reluctantly settled in the house again, before Father rushed out and wired that amiable

go-between, our mutual friend John Denton. He is back in New York again, as no doubt you know, and a return message came from him today, announcing that he will be with us in person on Friday, in order to "celebrate and to see the miracle with his own eyes." Isn't that nice? And won't your ears burn, distant Poet!

This is Monday. Sky-blue Monday. By Friday, perhaps, I may be allowed to spend the whole afternoon in my Green Playground.

Your friend, and so happily,

THE PRINCESS

NEW YORK
August 24th

Princess!

Your letter is here, and so elated me that I put a black cover over my chattering typewriter — it's *just* like a parrot, you know,— and I must occasionally convince it, by artificial means, that it is night — and left my cave dwelling for the day, in order to fully share your holiday sense. And when I returned, it was not alone. For what do you think? Right in the wilds of Manhattan I found Somebody who fairly begged to be sent to you! He goes to you by Mr. John Denton, and by the time this reaches you I hope he will feel himself very much at home. And I hope, too, that you will care for his companionship. His name is, appropriately, Wigglesworth. Please report to me on his arrival and subsequent behavior.

Lucky dog!

Yours,

RICHARD WARREN

CHAPTER IV

MIRACLES AND MISCHIEF

August 21

DIARY, I'M OUT OF DOORS!

August 28

Diary, you're not to scold. I know I've not honored you with so much as an exclamation point since my very first out-of-doors entry. But Mr. John Denton has been and gone — and Wigglesworth is here to stay! Let me see how it all happened.

Friday last, at exactly three, Sarah arrayed me as a lily of the field in a glorified turquoise and mauve negligée. There were even mauve-and-gold pompomed slippers on my worthless feet, and my newly washed hair was piled high and transfixed with my Mother's tortoise-shell Spanish comb. It was thus festively garbed that Father and Doctor Bill — by which name he shall henceforth be known, as some slight concession to his wizardry — settled me happily under my particular trees, there to await Mr. Denton's arrival. Sarah, at my insistence, smuggled a mirror into my hand and sleeve, and when I heard the smooth purr of the Denton motor, far up the road, I took one little peek. For if I am not allowed to be just an atom vain, what virtue is there in charming color schemes and frothing chiffons? Certainly, the negligée is distractingly pretty, and I am proud of Father's dress instinct. And something or other had brought the faintest tinge of

color to my cheeks, the shadow of a sparkle to my eyes. I was hoping that no one would detect me as I lay and admired myself. But the Doctor Bill person did, of course. He has eyes all over his head, that man! And promptly, he settled a lovely rainbow cushion behind my head, remarking very quietly,

"Perhaps this will heighten the effect, Miss Carroll! Poor Uncle John!"

I could have killed him!

As it was, Diary, although I almost blush to confess it, I — Well, as his disgustingly capable hand slid past my cheek, I turned my head, ever so little, and, quite delicately, I *bit!* Not hard, but in an extremely ladylike manner. There was no occasion for his rude exclamation, and the alarming brick-red which he proceeded to turn. Happily for us both, for I was torn between insincere apology and laughter, Mr. Denton arrived, engrossing his nephew's attention and my own.

As usual he was accompanied by half a dozen baskets of fruit and half a library shelf of the latest, lightest books. Best of all, he brought his own rotund self — and Wigglesworth!

I was prepared for something by Richard Warren's letter, which had come to me Friday morning. But not for this delicious bunch of black-satin, French bull puppy. For Wigglesworth is the acme, the ultimate perfection of dogdom. When, accompanied by gasps from all assembled, he leaped at me out of the chauffeur's restraining arms, I gave a perfectly healthy shriek, and clutched him, chiffons notwithstanding.

"Where did you get him, Denton?" asked Father, vainly endeavoring to part us.

"I didn't get him," answered Mr. Denton, smiling. "He was wished on me by an unknown admirer of Mavis."

Father extricated Wigglesworth, and holding him firmly — he has been well named — read aloud, from the silver and leather collar which adorned his fascinating neck, "Wigglesworth." Then, looking closer, added, "What's this? 'Property of H. R. H.'?"

I am afraid I looked guilty. Dr. Denton whistled, and stepped nearer the initials in question, or, shall I say, the questionable initials?

I was annoyed to see in how friendly a spirit Wigglesworth received the condescending medical hand upon his quivering ears.

Father is anything but slow. And I have long since let him into the secret of my romantic correspondence.

"So that's it," he began. And heaven alone knows what he might have added had I not held up an imploring hand.

Father, well-trained, subsided. But I didn't quite like the little crease between his brows. It was Mr. Denton, bless him, who saved the situation.

"Take me up to the house, Carroll," he said. "I have half an acre of Connecticut soil on my person." And off they went, arm in arm, with Mr. Denton casting a reassuring look at me over his shoulder.

Alone with Dr. Bill and the frantic Wigglesworth, "Well," I said, "isn't he wonderful?"

"Who?" asked the obtuse creature.

I pointed to the puppy, chasing his tail with verve.

"Very," he answered drily. "Do you realize, Miss Carroll, that you almost sat up?"

"When?" I shouted, very rudely, and quite disbelieving.

"About five minutes ago, when the dog jumped into your hammock."

"But," I insisted childishly, "I haven't been able to sit up all by myself since . . ."

"I know," he interrupted, "It's what you *have* done, not what you haven't, that is the point. Try again."

Half crying from excitement, I tried. But it was no use, and I sank back, helpless and hysterical.

"You see," I said sorrowfully.

"Yes."

He was looking at me out of those steel-blue eyes.

"We're not going to give up," he said. "But now you must be taken back into the house again. You're tired."

And no amount of pleading or denial could bend his inflexible will.

Wigglesworth came prancing into my room, just as the Doctor was leaving.

"You haven't said how adorable he is," I said, coaxing my new toy to the bed.

"Adorable!" he repeated, emphatically.

But, Diary-dear, the Doctor wasn't looking at the *dog!*

QUITE AT HOME
August 30th

Dear Poet:

By now Mr. Denton has brought you my incoherent note of thanks for the benison of Wigglesworth. Every day I thank you more. He is the dearest little friend one could imagine or wish for. I have taught him to bark loudly when I say your name, and I hope to bring him to an appreciation of poetry, by selected readings! Next week, sometime, I am to have my promised lawn fete to introduce

the countryside to the new member of our household. Even Sarah has succumbed. I heard her talking something suspiciously like baby-talk to him this morning, when she came in with my tray and observed Wiggles regarding her brightly and wagging all over, from his basket at the foot of my bed. And Father is a willing captive of his charms, even luring him from me on long, companionable walks. But I believe that he is jealous of you because he has never thought of getting me a dog. I have had birds and goldfish and even an Angora kitten which lived but to run away. But never since childhood a real live dog of my own. Mr. Denton must have worked some magic with Father that he has so inexplicably allowed me to accept so valuable a gift from —a stranger? But no, I cannot call you that!

I regret to report that Wigglesworth has conceived an adoration for the doctor. The one of no consequence, I mean. I cannot understand it, but there seems to be a natural affinity between the two.

Later, I must write you all the things, or, anyway, almost all, which Mr. Denton said about you. For of course we had a little session behind closed doors, and I asked the poor man questions until his grey head rang. Aren't you curious? But before I repeat to you what was, of course, told to me in strictest confidence, I must ask you *if those things are true.*

Wigglesworth sends his love. He is beside my bed, this minute, on the floor, holding up one paw in greeting.

Very gratefully yours,

WIGGLESWORTH'S SLAVE

GREEN HILL
September 5

Dear Diary, I'm sorry that I neglect you so. But you see, with friends calling every day to behold me, royally at home out of doors, and with a week's preparation for

my " Come one, come all " tea, which took place yesterday afternoon, and with almost daily letters from Richard Warren to answer — I've so many now that they make far too bulky a book of you and so I have them tied up with ribbon, under my pillow — and with Peter's recent heroic attempt to drink gasoline, and Wigglesworth's brilliant development as a bloodhound — well, I have had but little time for you, Blue Book.

Today, Father is out and Sarah busy below stairs. It is five o'clock of a golden September afternoon, and I am alone, and ready to record the events of the past week. Suppose we begin with Peter, who lives next door, as you very well know, and who is an active and ambitious and altogether charming seven-year old. It seems, Diary, that Peter has, during the summer, become hopelessly enamored of Jimmy Simpson, the ten-year old brother of Sammy, a feckless towhead, tanned as a saddle and twice as tough! From my windows, and more recently also from the nearer vantage point of my hammock, I have observed the progress of their friendship, dating from the early days of summer when Jimmy condescended to aid his older brother in the morning delivery of the Simpson milk. Lately, Jimmy has been seen displaying his ragged blue overalls about the lawn adjoining ours. I have heard, too, blood-curdling shrieks and dire groans which I take to portend that Peter has more than once inveigled Jimmy into his own favorite and histrionic pastime of " Injuns and Tigers." Once, Jimmy in his role of scalper became slightly too realistic, and Peter, bursting through the hedge which separates the Goodrich property from ours, fled to me for protection. With his curly head on my breast, I turned against the aggressor.

" Jimmy Simpson," I cried indignantly, " aren't you

ashamed to frighten a boy younger than yourself? Don't you know that isn't manly?"

Jimmy, engaging, brazen, and blue-eyed, stubbed one bare toe against the grass.

"Honest, Miss Mavis," he defended himself firmly, "I didn't hurt him none. He's a *baby,* he is!" he concluded, with a positively vicious glance at the back of Peter's head.

"I'm not!" shouted the accused, rising up in honest wrath.

"Y'are," repeated Jimmy. "Baby an' telltale."

Here Peter, to my infinite delight, squared two small brown fists, and disengaging himself from my restraining hands, advanced belligerently upon his idol.

"You Jimmy," said Peter. "You take that back—quick!"

I swear I saw a gleam of admiration in the Simpson eye.

"Yes," I begged hastily, "do take it back, Jimmy."

Jimmy shifted uneasily upon his capacious feet.

"Well," he began uncertainly. And then a wholly friendly smile irradiated his freckled face. "I was only funning, Peter," he said generously.

I breathed again. Peter dropped his hands to his sides and said happily, "Got any cookies for us, Mavis?"

I rang my silver bell for Sarah, and presently she appeared from the kitchen, greeted Jimmy in none too friendly accents, and disappearing into her domain returned again with a heaped plate of crisp tan cookies and three glasses of lemonade.

"There," said Sarah, grudgingly, "you young limbs!"

She looked at my two small friends as she spoke, but I am afraid she included me in her remark.

This incident served to show Jimmy the mettle of my seven year old neighbor. It was by way of a delicate tribute to Peter that he was asked, on the following day, to be one of six competitors in a foot race which, starting from his own gate, was to end at the cross roads some five hundred yards distant. Just before the start he came over and exhibited himself to me, clad in vest and drawers, with sneakers on his little feet and a huge red 5 decorating his visibly inflated chest.

Solemnly, I shook his hand and wished him well. Then I lay back in my hammock to await the result of the race.

Half an hour later, Peter, very red in the face, very hot, and manfully trying to suppress his tears, appeared through the gap in the hedge, with Jimmy in close attendance.

"He won!" said Peter, disconsolately, pointing a dusty forefinger at his companion.

"But Pete came in second," hastily put in the victor, standing at the foot of my swinging couch.

"I — I wanted to win," announced Peter, the uncomforted. Then, seeing my eyes fixed in affection and condolence on him, he gave one loud frantic gulp and came into my arms.

"But, Peter darling," I said to the one small red ear I could see, "you must remember that you are only seven if you *are* big for your age, and all the other boys are much older, aren't they, Jimmy?" I asked ..s with my most appealing look over Peter's bowed head toward the Simpson scion.

"Yes, Miss Mavis, ma'am," corroborated Jimmie loudly. "An' Pete, he done awful good to come in sec-

ond. Why, Josh Watkins was in the race too, and he's eleven an' a terrible swift runner."

"You see?" I said to the Ear.

Peter raised his head and thrust his grimy fists into his eyes.

"It's all right," he said bravely, "only. . . ."

"Never mind, dear," I begged, "next time you'll come in first, won't he, Jimmy?"

"Sure!" agreed Jimmy heartily. And Peter, content with the confidence of his vanquisher, presently made off with him, saying earnestly, "But Jimmy, what makes you go so fast?"

Two days later, swinging lazily between my trees and reading *The Lyric Hour* to Wiggles, who listened attentively and with cocked, inquiring ears, I was horrified to see Mrs. Goodrich hurtle herself through the hedge, followed by Loretta, her black cook, both of them wringing their hands — Loretta, I swear, almost as white as her mistress — and both demanding,

"*Have* you seen Peter?"

"Why, no," I answered, "not today. Why?"

Sarah, her sixth sense telling her that something was wrong, appeared simultaneously at the foot of my hammock.

"Oh, Mavis," said Peter's pretty mother, "he's lost! He's been gone two hours, and we've been everywhere!"

Loretta, her apron over her kinky head, rocked to and fro.

I looked at Sarah.

"Have you seen him?" I asked, my heart standing very still.

"No, Miss Mavis."

Except for the sound of Loretta's noisy weeping, we were quite quiet.

"*The Black Pond!*" said Mrs. Goodrich, in a whisper.

"Don't!" said Sarah and I together.

For the Black Pond, Diary, up the road, is a wicked sheet of water, depthless and sinister.

I have never cursed my helplessness as I did then.

"Perhaps Jimmy Simpson . . ." I began. But Mrs. Goodrich interrupted me.

"Loretta has been to the Simpsons', Mavis. Jimmy is off with Sammy somewhere. No one has seen or heard of Peter since this morning. And we have not seen him since luncheon."

"Where's Father?" I asked, looking at Sarah.

"Somewhere's with Doctor Denton," she answered. And as she did so, a gay whistle reached me from the direction of our gate.

"Perhaps that's Father now," I said hopefully. But it was only Doctor Bill, hatless, coatless, swinging up the path and cutting across to us.

"Miss Carroll," he said smiling, "your father asked me to tell you . . ." and then, "Why, what's the matter?"

He looked from one to the other, and it was Sarah who answered.

"It's Peter, Doctor. He's lost."

"Lost! Nonsense. He couldn't get lost here. Every one in Green Hill knows the little chap. Where have you looked?" he asked Mrs. Goodrich.

"Everywhere. And telephoned every house for miles. His father is in town, you know. Oh . . ." she broke off incoherently, "I can never forgive myself — my baby —"

The doctor's hand was on her, quieting, soothing.

"Mustn't break down, Mrs. Goodrich. Suppose you sit here for a bit with Miss Carroll and get your breath. We'll find the boy, won't we, Wiggles?" The dog jumped at the sound of his name in the beloved voice, and began chasing his tail in an ecstasy of showing off.

Dr. Denton beckoned Sarah, spoke to her in a low voice, and I heard her answer, "Yes sir," before she left the group and went toward the house, taking Loretta with her.

"Who saw him last?" asked the doctor cheerfully, sitting down with Wiggles on his knee.

"Michel, our chauffeur. Peter was with him in the barn right after lunch."

"And where is Michel now?"

"He went with several of the men on the place to search," said Mrs. Goodrich. "I think — they didn't tell me, but I think they mean to drag the pond —" She went to pieces there. But it was only for a moment, for Sarah appeared again, with a glass of something. Dr. Benton took it from her.

"Drink this," he said quietly, his hand on Mrs. Goodrich's shoulder.

Watching him, I suddenly knew that it would be all right; that Peter was not really lost, but only mislaid; that we would all be spared a cruel and terrible sorrow. He seemed to read my mind, for he nodded at me and said, smiling, "That's better, Miss Carroll."

Sometimes I think that the man is really a magician.

It was perhaps ten mintues later that Michel appeared through the hedge. Mrs. Goodrich, rather dangerously calm, I thought, got to her feet.

"Well?" she breathed.

The chauffeur shook his head.

"No trace ,ma'am. The boys are still looking...."

"The Black Pond . . .?" she asked, in a whisper, one hand at her throat.

"They're down there now."

"Ah!"

She was at Dr. Denton's side now, her hands on his arm. "Please help us." Her eyes sought his.

"I'm going to do my best," he answered. "Michel, did Peter say anything to you in the barn about going out to play?"

The Irishman's face corrugated in an effort to remember.

"No, doctor, sor. Not that I mind. He came out, the lad, to ask me what makes cars go fast."

"What?"

It was I who spoke. The foot race of two days before flashed suddenly into my mind, and the last thing I had heard Peter say, "But Jimmy, what makes you go so fast?"

"What did you tell him?" I asked eagerly.

"Well," Michel scratched his red head, "I told him the gasoline, Miss Mavis, just to keep him quiet."

In a word I told the others about the race and Peter's disappointment. "You don't suppose," I finished, hesitating, "that he tried to . . ."

"Drink gasoline?" concluded Dr. Benton thoughtfully.

We all looked at Michel.

"Well," he said slowly, "seems to me that I did see him foolin' around the tank. But I was busy, and when I looked up again, he was gone."

"I seen him runnin'," interposed Loretta suddenly. "Runnin' down toward the gate. I remember now!"

"Gasoline!" said Peter's mother pitifully, "Would . . . would it *kill* him, Doctor?"

The doctor laughed outright.

"Not by a long shot," he answered cheerfully. "And if he did take a drink of it, I'll wager it wasn't a very long drink. Now, Mrs. Goodrich, you and Loretta go home, and get some water heated, and fetch out a pot of mustard. I'm off with Wiggles to find the young athlete."

And that's all, Diary, except that they did find him. It was Wiggles, really, who discovered him in a deserted barn half a mile up the road, sleeping peacefully and smelling to high heaven of the gas. Home they brought him, and it must go on record that though mustard and warm water had no effect whatsoever upon that cast iron little stomach, every time Peter coughed Dr. Denton swears that the gasoline fumes nearly knocked him over!

"Did you really drink it, sweetheart?" asked his mother just before she tucked him in bed.

"Course," answered Peter, wide-eyed. "Mike said it made the cars go fast, so I tried it. I didn't like it much," he confessed, "but golly, how I ran! I wish Jimmy could have seen me!"

And on that, Peter fell asleep.

Diary, I am nearly asleep too. Won't Sarah scold if she catches me! So I will postpone till tomorrow my account of the Lawn Tea — and — the Utterly New Man imminent in our midst!

Now, aren't you curious?

CHAPTER V

The Very Next Day

I was so tired last night, Diary, that I couldn't sleep, and Sarah blames you! She has just said, sternly, "No more writing, Miss Mavis," and vanished from the room. Out you come, from under my pillow, in lawless defiance of the mandate. For it's raining and dull, and I can't go out of doors, and so I must have something to occupy me, must I not? But isn't it perfectly wonderful that the rain should deprive me of something? For, it was only a very short time ago that rain or sunshine meant very little to me, aside from aesthetic pleasure, and shut or open windows as the case might be! Now for a description of the Lawn Fete!

It was an early affair; three o'clock, to be exact. And very young September put on her very gayest appearance for me. Father and Sarah, Dr. Bill and Dr. Mac, constituted themselves a Committee on Decoration and Refreshments, and as a consequence we had a lawn gay with wicker chairs, hammocks, cushions, tables, flags, and flowers; and a very important table loaded with sandwiches, tiny cakes, bonbons, and all manner of cool drinkables. And — then came the crowds! I do believe everyone in Green Hill turned out, from Sammy and his Rosie-of-the-Telegraph (I wonder what happened to the messages during that afternoon? Never mind! No one would have been home to receive them!), to Peter and his small friends and old Granny Wallace, who drove up in

a dilapidated buggy, and wore a new black bonnet for the occasion. I wore — and this will interest you — the mauve and turquoise negligée, with various additions. One was a bunch of the loveliest, glowingest orchids you have ever seen, which was brought to me by Mr. John Denton, who made a flying half-hour's return trip for the express purpose, he said, of kissing my hands and delivering the flowers, which he assured me came from the donor of Wiggles. A card with the orchids read, "To match a delightful costume." So Mr. Denton, the villain, has been talking! Under my laces, I wore Richard Warren's jade lucky-piece, and in honor of the occasion I decorated Wiggles, much to his disgust, with a huge purple bow. It was very becoming to his lively and brunette beauty, as all who saw him will attest.

It was a dear afternoon. Everyone was so happy for me. They fairly overwhelmed me with good wishes and affectionate, optimistic prophecies. My two medicos kept a very stern guard over me. It seemed as if I couldn't get rid of one or the other for more than a moment at a time. But I had Dr. Mac in a perfectly beautiful rage by accusing him of trying to steal the Scandinavian heart of Hildeborg, my massive masseuse. Oh yes, she was there too, marvellously gotten up, her yellow head very much in the foreground and her big voice booming out at the most inopportune moments in more than the most inopportune remarks, thereby greatly endangering the preservation of gravity in those present. Her public advice to Dr. Mac, along lines of reduction, was extremely exhilarating!

We had music, rendered slightly off key, but with all the good will in the world, by the Green Hill Musical Four, consisting of a Simpson, a Watkins, and the Jones

twins, who performed respectively upon a cornet, a violin, a banjo, and a mouth-organ. It was, Diary, the very last word in successful parties. Only one thing occurred to cast any shadow over a wonderful day. And, of all people selected by an unkind Fate to sully my happiness, it was Peter who, to mix metaphors somewhat, cast the first stone. In the presence of at least six villagers, including Granny Wallace, the town gossip, he regarded my frivolity of a lace and ribbon cap, and asked, as solemnly as a mouth full to capacity with cake would permit, "Mavis, *how* do you set your cap?"

"How do I what?" I asked in all innocence, one hand to my headgear.

"Set it," he repeated. "Sally says that Adeline says that you are setting your cap for Doctor Denton!"

Adeline, Diary, is Sally's sister, and Dr. Denton's cook.

Several in the group about me laughed, and Granny Wallace's ears grew visibly in length.

"I can't imagine what you mean, Peterkins," I answered with well-assumed carelessness, and turned to talk volubly with Mrs. Goodrich, who was adding to the gaiety by saying audibly, "Hush, Peter!"

But Peter was not to be silenced.

"Sally says," he protested, in his clear little voice, "that Adeline says she told doctor Denton about it, your cap, you know, and that he laughed out loud and said you could for all of him!"

"What's that about Doctor Denton?" asked that individual, suddenly coming up quietly behind the group.

Talk about bombshells!

Despite Mrs. Goodrich's frantic attempt to hush her young hopeful, Peter, his hand in Doctor Denton's, obligingly repeated his story.

"An'," he concluded, turning to me wistfully, "please, Mavis, won't you set it for me? I'd like to see how you do it!"

Amid an awestruck silence, Doctor Denton swung Peter, who squealed with delight, up and up to his broad shoulder, and said, laughing but a little red,

"Nonsense, old chap, Miss Carroll won't set her cap for you for — well, about twenty years, more or less. But isn't it a pretty cap?" With a wicked laugh he turned and strode off, Peter clinging to his shock of dark hair and asking very loudly, "But does she do it like hens do, Doctor Uncle?"

I haven't the remotest idea what happened after that. I vaguely remember Granny Wallace hurrying and cackling off, and the other members of the group trying to compose their features and to re-order their conversation. That Mrs. Goodrich, before she left, bent over me and whispered, "Mavis dear, I'm *so* sorry!" helped matters, as far as I was concerned, not one whit. By the same evening, I am certain that the story was all over Green Hill. Even Sarah said something to me, before I went to bed. . . .

Somehow, I should have though my helplessness would have protected me a little. . . .

After my guests had gone, Doctor Denton appeared on the scene.

"MacAllister and I will carry you up to your room now, Miss Carroll," he said cheerily.

I felt very tired, very cross, and behaved, I'm afraid, like a schoolgirl.

"If you'll get Doctor Mac and Father. . . ."

He went quite white.

"Very well," he said stiffly, and turned away. I did

not see him again that day, or for several days thereafter.

I wonder if he really said that I "could for all of him?"

New York City
September 11th

Contrary Princess!

Do you think it kind of Your Royal Benevolence to write me the most charming note in the world to thank me for my flowers, and then to almost ruin it by a postscript, a scolding — dare I say, nagging — postscript, in which you sternly forbid me to give myself pleasure and send you "anything more, ever"! You are an — an Indian *Receiver,* that's what you are! And I refuse to have any dealings with your postscript! I will separate it carefully from the rest of the letter, and consign it to candle flame.

I am glad you enjoyed your lawn party. Sorry, though, that anything should have happened during your At Home day to disturb you. Although you do not tell me what it was, I have put two and two together, made a hundred and six, and deducted that some member of my blundering and heavy-footed sex stepped upon your sensibilities. But I am sure you have forgiven him by now—although far be it from me to hold any brief for an unknown and hated rival!

Please, may I come to your next party? I am sure my mother would be willing to chaperone me. I forwarded her your last note; it was addressed to her and I did not dare keep it. But I read it (yes, I did) and I do not notice that you scolded her about those rose-grey bed socks! Indeed, you seemed very glad to have them. She has been fretting, I know, that they were not finished sooner, but she was called away, as no doubt she told you in her letter, by an illness in the family.

My respects to Wiggles. I wonder if he is entirely cognizant of his good fortune?

I have told you once that everything John Denton says of me is false, unless it is particularly pleasant. And then it hardly does me justice. Now, after my repeated demands, will you tell me what he said?

Yours very truly,

RICHARD WARREN

P.S. I have found more in the business form of signature than I had dreamed existed. Let me repeat it another way,

Very truly — yours,

R. W.

UNDER-THE-TREES
September 14th

Dear and Caviling Poet:

You deserved to be scolded. But we will say no more about it. And I have decided to relent and tell you what Mr. John Denton said. He said

That you were shy
That you were very blonde
That you were very impractical
That you were very generous
That you were an incorrigible dreamer
And that he though you were in love!

What have you to reply to these six counts of his indictment?

Curiously yours,

THE PRINCESS

NEW YORK CITY
September 17th

Dear Portia:

Lies! All counts of the indictment to be immediately quashed — save the very last!

RICHARD WARREN

GREEN HILL
September 19

Diary, I have a two-line letter from Richard Warren which I am afraid to answer. And it's all my fault!

CHAPTER VI

Revelations and Results

Green Hill
September 20

The New Young Man has arrived in our village. An embarrassment of riches! He is a college friend of that Doctor Person, a painter and a poet as well! I have graciously given my consent that he be brought to call. I wonder what he looks like? Not like his name, I hope, which is Penny! Father just came upstairs, and asked me if I would be ready to see Dr. Denton in fifteen minutes. He looked quite funny when he said it, and seemed so ill at ease. I can't imagine. . . . Well, Diary, although the Doctor doesn't deserve it, I fancy I shall call Sarah and tell her to get me the rose-and-grey bed jacket which is so becoming — to my room!

Three Hours Later

Diary, it's not possible! I can't believe it! I've been here half an hour alone, trying to realize all that it will mean to me, and trying to collect my thoughts. Fifteen minutes to the second after Father spoke to me about this impending and oddly formal visit of the Doctor's, he ushered that gentleman into the room, placed a low chair for him by the bed, and then, taking my hands, said very gravely, "Mavis, Dr. Denton wants to talk to you for a little while. He has something which he is very anxious

to persuade you to do. I have told him that, without your consent, it is impossible. You know that I will never force you to anything. But will you listen to him, dear, and for all our sakes try to say 'Yes'?" As if he had to plead with me, my father, for whom I would do anything in the world!

Since the day I was brought home, broken, I have never seen my Father so moved. More out of nervousness than anything else, I said, "Daddy, it sounds like a proposal!"

The minute I said it I was sorry — and glad. For although Father laughed, Dr. Denton looked perfectly furious! It must be painful to turn the color he does — like a — a chameleon.

Then Father kissed me. Under his breath I heard him say, "God bless my Mavis!" and in a moment I was alone with the enemy.

The steel-blue eyes regarded me for a full moment, and then, almost sternly, he spoke.

"Miss Carroll," he said, "with your permission, and with your help, without which we can do nothing, we are going to ask you to make a series of efforts: first, to sit erect unaided; then, to stand; and, by slow degrees, to walk."

There was something so confident in his tone! Perhaps he might have gone on, but I flung out both hands to him, and he waited.

"Doctor!" I cried, "Doctor — it isn't possible! I have tried! They made me try at first, and it nearly killed me. Don't make me," I begged childishly; "don't make me go through all that horror again!"

"There will be no horror," he said deliberately. "There will be pain — yes — but comparatively slight.

All through the summer I have watched your case. Little by little we have stimulated the unused muscles, as you have gained in vitality. At the time following your accident, it was naturally torture to you to be forced to submit to the hands of doctors and nurses. But eleven years have gone by, and I am convinced, and have convinced both our good friend MacAllister and your father, that the injury to your back has long since healed, and that nothing remains but the inflexibility of the muscles and, if I may term it such, a type of mental paralysis."

"You mean. . . ." I began, not yet believing.

"I mean," he interrupted, "that your mind has persuaded your body that it will never walk again. Now, *I* know better. Yours is not the first case of this sort which has been brought to my attention. I have seen six cures out of eight such cases during my studies abroad. They interested me very much. It was primarily your case that brought me to Green Hill. And the cure — please believe me — rests entirely with you."

"I don't believe it!" I said flatly, staring at him. "It simply isn't possible that half a hundred doctors have been mistaken." And my eyes, although my tongue did not, said very plainly, "And who are you?"

For the first time, he smiled.

"I am sorry," he said, "if I have been unable to inspire you with so little confidence. The 'half a hundred' doctors were probably quite correct — at the time they had your case. How long has it been since you have had a specialist?"

"Six — no, seven years," I answered, and shuddered.

"I thought so," he said. And then, very suddenly, "Miss Carroll, do you *want* to walk again? Do you

want to be a normal, active girl, instead of a semi-invalid?"

I hated his tone.

"Of course I do," I fairly shouted, "do — do you think I'm a fool?"

"Sometimes," answered the amazing creature, calmly.

I was too angry to speak.

"Look here, Miss Carroll," he said quietly, "let's get down to brass tacks. For eleven years you have lain on your back, allowing yourself to be waited on, coddled, wrapped in cotton wool. You have had the companionship of your father, who is the finest man in the world, but whose whole life is wrapped up in you, and who has sacrificed that life to your whims and your desires. Your father was never meant to be buried down here; not with that personality and fine brain. Think of the doors which should be open to him and which your illness has closed, — travel, society, the exploration of places and people, instead of a rather pretty, very narrow, Connecticut *rut!* You have had Sarah — sentimental to a degree under a rocky exterior, ready and anxious to work her fingers to the bone to please you. You have had an entire village at your beck and call; have dispensed justice and advice from your bed like Royalty; and you have thrived on it, my dear lady, thrived on the adoration and the sacrifice, and on your own martyrdom. Now, I am here solely to give you a chance to repay your father and all the others for their love and care and coddling. Do you realize that your father is a comparatively young man? That, by tying him to your bedside you have narrowed his life down until it consists of this room, this house, this tiny village? It's up to you to give something to your father. It may cost you pain. But I wonder if you have any

idea of what you have cost him in heartache? Are you willing to make the effort, if only for his sake?"

No one in all my life had ever spoken to me like that! I was so hurt, so outraged, so bewildered, it seemed as if I just couldn't live a minute longer, with that cool, cutting voice in my ears.

"You — you — brute!" I said, choking, "It's not fair! Do you mean to tell me that I am selfish and unkind? That I don't love my father? That I am a useless, worthless hypochondriac?"

He smiled.

"Perhaps I wouldn't put it quite so strongly," he suggested courteously.

I shut my hands hard under the bedclothes and held my head very high.

"Very well," I told him, rather viciously, "I will do all you say, if Father and Doctor MacAllister are agreed."

I could feel the red spots burning on my cheeks. And in my mind I was saying, over and over, like a child, "I'll show you! *I'll show you!*" I think I almost hoped I should die — just to make him sorry. And it was so hard to keep the tears back. I wouldn't cry. I *wouldn't.*

I cried.

Suddenly, his arm was around me, and his voice, so changed, so immeasurably gentle, was saying, very close,

"You poor little kid!"

"I hate you!" I said, at that.

The arm tightened; then dropped. Dr. Denton rose.

"Good!" he said, heartily, towering above me. "That's something to work on! Well, I have your promise, and for love of your father and hate of me you'll walk yet, before the winter. And now, I will send Sarah to

you with something to quiet those — outraged feelings. Tomorrow we'll begin the treatment."

Then he left the room.

And that's all Diary. I had a talk with Father. I can't set it down here. It was too beautiful and too intimate. But now that I realize all that it has meant, this long illness of mine, and all that my recovery might mean to him, I am willing to undergo any torture, any agony; willing even to endure the Cruel Magician and his Black Magic.

How I hate him, Diary! It makes me feel quite strong to hate anyone so,— I, who have always cared for people, and lived on their love.

What have I just written . . . "lived on their love" . . . ? I wonder if he is right, if I *have* taken everything, and given nothing in return?

Tonight, with my mind and soul in chaos, I wish more than ever that my Mother had lived.

Dear Diary, silent and loyal confidant, wish me well for tomorrow!

GREEN HILL
September 22

Yesterday, Diary, was the most exhausting day I have ever survived! An alternate succession of massage and naps, and naps and massage! And two efforts to sit up! The first was quite unsuccessful. I was trembling all over with excitement, and perhaps fear. And at the very first attempt, fear of pain and the immediate succeeding pain itself, absolutely unnerved me. Dr. Mac, standing close beside the bed, looked across at his colleague. He didn't shake his head, but the expression in his keen old eyes was equivalent. Dr. Denton frowned.

"Will you try again, in a few minutes, Miss Carroll?" he asked, ignoring Dr. Mac, and the little hurt, despairing sound which I couldn't help making.

"I can't!" I said flatly.

He spread out his hands in an entirely foreign gesture of defeat.

"Of course, if you prefer not . . ." he suggested sketchily.

There was something so positively scornful in the look he bent on me that I writhed. I made my two eyes as much like swords as possible — I hope, Diary, that they were not crossed! — and snapped, "Do you mean to imply . . .?"

Suddenly I stopped. I was looking straight into the steel-blue eyes, and it was not until I saw their frosty expression change to something distinctly like triumph that I discovered that — *I was sitting up!*

Actually! But only for the fraction of a minute. It was the discovery itself, I think, that laid me flat again, with Dr. Mac's arm around me, and his disengaged hand stretched across the bed, frantically shaking Dr. Denton's.

"Laddie, 'tis mar-r-vellous!" he was saying, with a remarkable rolling of his r's.

But Dr. Denton was looking at me.

"You see," he said quietly, "that after all you *can* do it. It is only a matter of patience, and the will to conquer. And perhaps a certain amount of—impetus."

He was smiling, quite flushed, his eyes more brilliant than I had ever seen them.

"And now," he said, "suppose I go down and tell your father. He has been walking the floor ever since we

came up, I know. We wont bother you again today, Miss Carroll. But tomorrow you're going to be perfectly amazed to see how easy it will be to repeat the performance."

After he had gone, Dr. Mac walked around my little room, loquacious for once in his life.

"Isn't he a wonder?" he kept asking me. "Lassie, it's worth living for just to meet a man like that. The born healer," he kept saying over and over, "the born healer!"

"I've no doubt," I said politely, "that Dr. Denton is a very able physician."

Dr. Mac stopped in his tracks, so suddenly that he nearly fell over.

"What's this? What's this?" he said, his bushy eyebrows drawn down over his eyes, so closely that I could not see their expression.

I repeated my remark.

One piercing glance, the suspicion of a twinkle, a deep, disconcerting chuckle. And then my old friend said cryptically,

"So that's the way the land lies, little Mavis!"

"What do you mean?" I began, irritably. I seem to be in a continual state of annoyance these days, Diary.

But he had gone, and all the way downstairs I could hear him chuckling.

Even my succeeding little thanksgiving talk with Father failed to put me in a good humor again.

I think Doctor Mac is horrid!

But if I am cured, Diary, won't I make them *all* "sit up!"

New York City
September 22d

Dear Lady:

Have I offended you in any way?

Yours-willing-to-be-penitent-if-necessary
Richard Warren

The Castle
September 25th

Dear Poet:

Certainly not! But when one is slowly and forcibly being resurrected, one has little time for letter writing. Shall I tell you the program which has been laid out for me? But first of all, I must tell you that I am actually able to sit up for a few moments each day. And after I grow stronger and more daring, a chair is to be substituted for my bed, and then a wheel chair; and maybe after that a real live automobile! And finally, so I have been promised, I am to learn to walk! Fancy being such a baby! But this very morning, the Biggest, most Expensive, Busiest Specialist in the country—who knew me eleven years ago when he was not quite so big or expensive or busy—came to our little house, and after a prolonged Examination told us that there was no reason on earth why I should not recover wholly and absolutely. It will take time, he said, but it is certain. And I need undergo no knife, or painful treatment. I am only to mind, and not be in too great a hurry.

I feel as if, link by link, the fetters were falling. I hardly dare think ahead—to the day when the great round world shall be mine again. To the day when I shall go to all the places I only know from books and pictures. I want to go to the theatre. I want to see a horse race! I want to sail in a boat! And I want to walk and walk and walk! And, Poet, I want to fly!

I must never be very athletic, they say. Probably I shall

never ride or skate, or even drive a car! I don't know — it doesn't matter, of course. But I do hope that I may dance! I've dreamed of dancing. You know, in my dreams, I am always strong and well.

You are happy with me and for me, I am sure. And sometimes I think that your letters and your friendship have given me courage and faith which otherwise I should not have had. It must be a beautiful world, and life must be a wonderful thing, if poets can live and make us see beauty through their clear eyes.

I am very grateful to you. And all through the perils and adventures of being reborn, I shall be glad to feel that you are thinking of me, and holding your thumbs. Will you, please?

Do you know a painter-poet named Penny? At least, that is his real name. He writes under a slightly more suitable cognomen, but I have been unable, in our brief acquaintance, to drag it from him. He seems a very nice person indeed, and made a long call on me this morning.

Wiggles wags.

Yours, in at least the fifth heaven,

ME

GREEN HILL
September 25

Diary, Dr. Denton brought the Penny-man to see me today. Perhaps as a flesh-and-blood flag of truce. At all events, it was more than an amusing experience. I was out-of-doors, propped up in my now very ambitious position, feeding Wiggles tea biscuits, and reading *The Lyric Hour* for the millionth time. When the two men appeared, I was declaiming aloud, slightly drunk by the most marvellously blue-hazy day, and feeling tremendously strong and happy. After the introductions,

"I've brought you good medicine, Miss Carroll," said

Dr. Denton, indicating his embarrassed friend. "A real live poet! The only one in captivity! Eats out of the hand. But — I warn you he is modest. The proverbial violet is brazen compared to Wright. And he won't lionize worth a nickel, and I am sworn to silence concerning his prowess with the pen, and even his nom-de-guerre."

Mr. Penny — isn't it a dreadful name! — and combined with Wright, too! — sat down limply in the chair beside me.

"Please," he said, pleasantly and plaintively, "don't pay any attention to him."

"I never do," I said in my sugariest tones.

Dr. Denton lowered his inches to the ground, and there, sprawled like a starfish, regarded me brightly.

"She's truthful," he assured his friend. "She never does. And you've no idea how she dislikes me. That handicaps you at the start, Wright, old fellow. Doesn't it, Miss Carroll?"

I considered Mr. Penny's amiable, blonde countenance judicially.

"It might," I agreed.

"You see?" This from the Creature in a piercing stage whisper.

"But it doesn't!" I finished, smiling brilliantly at Mr. Penny, who appeared slightly confused.

Catching at a straw, which happened to be the beloved *Lyric Hour,* the Unknown — I simply can't call him Penny all the time — it's too ridiculous! — picked up the book, which was lying beside me, and immediately gave the most theatrical start I have ever seen. I've never seen plays, of course, but I have read them, and know

stage directions when I see them in the flesh. This was a particularly good example of "confronted with the telltale revolver, Sebastian starts violently. . . ."

"Richard Warren," read the Stranger aloud, with a very poor affectation of indifference.

"Yes," I said, "do you know him?"

The Penny turned a beautiful crimson.

"I've read the book," he faltered.

My back may be weak, but my eyes are good. And the glance that passed between Dr. Denton and his friend did not escape me.

"It's nothing to be ashamed of, old man," said the former soothingly, "particularly as it appears to be Miss Carroll's chief literary diet."

"Is it?" asked my guest, rather excitedly, I thought.

"I adore it!" I answered, with all the schoolgirl fervor I could muster. And it rang true, Diary, for it is!

Dr. Denton looked at me keenly.

"Lucky book!" he said lightly, while Mr. Penny added almost under his breath,

"Lucky author!"

He has nice, doggie, brown eyes, and very fair hair. I smiled into the former and longed to stroke the latter; it was so very smooth and shining.

"Won't you tell me about your own work?" I asked, beguilingly.

"Yes, do," urged Dr. Denton politely.

The Unknown blushed some more.

"I — I —" he began somewhat wildly, "please, let's not. I'm very new at the game, and. . . ."

His voice trailed off, and he sat hunched up in his chair, looking at me most pitifully. I was honestly sorry

for him, although not a little intrigued; and most inexplicably suspicious.

"Here's Wiggles," I said, "let's talk about him. Isn't he a duck?"

Wiggles, very sleek and beautiful, jumped gaily into my visitor's lap and they became firm friends at once.

"Why," I said, watching them, "he acts as if he knew you!"

Mr. Penny looked up quickly.

"I've one much like him, at home," he said. "Perhaps your puppy recognizes that. All my clothes are very doggy," he added, with a perfectly charming smile.

"Wiggles," I said, "has excellent judgment — generally!"

It was impossible not to cast the smallest, swiftest glance possible at my enemy, as I said it. I had the advantage; but Dr. Denton, from the ground, deliberately grinned at me.

"She means," he explained carefully, "that Wiggles is quite partial to me. And, of course, she cannot understand it."

He reached up a long, lazy arm and removed the dog from his friend's lap; then, lying flat on his back and holding Wiggles quite close to his face, he very calmly winked at him! And believe it or not, Diary, with my own eyes I saw Wiggles solemnly and unmistakably *wink back!*

If that isn't Black Magic, what is it?

After that, we three chatted comfortably for the better part of an hour. Mr. Penny, gradually coming forth from his shell, proved a wholly delightful companion. And I flirted! I've read about it in books, of course,

but haven't been able to practise very much. Still, I think I did very well for a beginner. I am sure Dr. Denton thought so too, for once I heard him say "Minx!" to Wiggles, quite fretfully. Anyway, he didn't seem to like it.

When they got up to go, I begged Mr. Penny to come again.

His response was very flattering.

"Indeed I will," he began. But Dr. Denton interrupted him.

"I thought you had a pressing engagement in town," he said, significantly.

Mr. Penny made a really magnificent gesture of carelessness. "I have forgotten it!" he said.

"I'm reminding you," said his "old college chum" nastily.

I put down my hand to Wiggles, who kissed it obligingly.

"Were you ever in a manger, Wiggles darling?" I asked with interest.

Wiggles barked. And Mr. Penny, who had just discovered that Dr. Denton had been lying on his hat, turned to me with an expression of bewilderment.

"I beg your pardon," he said, with his ruined headgear in his hand.

"I was just speaking to Wiggles," I assured him.

"Oh!"

I have no doubt that he thought me mad. Still, he must like a certain form of insanity, for his farewell was almost tragic.

As he left, he bent near me and said, quite low, "I'm awfully glad you like Richard Warren, Miss Carroll."

"Why?" I asked innocently. But, if he answered at

all, his reply was swallowed up in Dr. Denton's laugh, an insulting cachinnation, to say the least.

And as *he* left, the Creature bent near me and said, quite loudly, "You don't fight fair, Adversary!"

I suppose, Diary, if I repeat how much I dislike him, you will finally cease to believe me. But I think you may safely take it for granted.

Isn't it odd that Mr. Penny should be very blond and shy? It isn't possible that. . . .? Of course not, and yet. . . . Well, foolish of me or not, it will be difficult to write Richard Warren now, as long as I half suspect. There was a stiltedness about my letter to him today even. And yet . . . I can't quite believe it. Probably Mr. John Denton was only drawing on his imagination, after all! Still . . . ?

New York City
September 28th

Dear Lady!

I have been out of town for a few days, and when I returned was greeted by your letter. Even the envelope looked happy! And I am so supremely glad for you. The keys of my typewriter would sing like a piano, if they could. Isn't that the most absurd sentence? But I feel absurdly gay, myself. For now, perhaps, I can persuade you to let me come to your next lawn party. You never answered my question, by the way. So, being a persistent devil, I repeat it. May I?

Honestly, I eat with a fork, and my hair is cut in accordance with the usual — rather hideous — fashion set for members of my sex.

I don't seem to remember your friend with the interesting name. Perhaps, if you could discover his pen name...? But I really know very few people of writing bent.

I've been out of town, and was delightfully entertained by

a very old friend of mine. And have come back with tons of inspiration for the new book, which, by the way, is rapidly growing. Mr. Denton is anxious for an early publication, but I do not feel that I can complete the volume until Spring.

Would you care for it as a coming-out present? I should be very proud...

Dear little Lady, I am certain that these must be very trying days for you. And I am holding my thumbs hard! Our pen and ink friendship has been so dear to me, all these summer months. It has been both letter and spirit, has it not? Can you forgive the atrocious punning? And I am hoping that very soon you will make yourself known to me, and let me come where you are and tell you... But, until you do, I cannot tell you *what*!

Yours always,
RICHARD WARREN

October 1st

Dear Mr. Warren:

Pléase, please, don't ask me to let you come! I am so afraid — of so many things! And I am certain that you would be very disillusioned. Really, I'm a most disagreeable person in the flesh! I can refer you to at least one person who sees me every day and who thinks so!

Won't you be content to allow me to remain just a small, and, I hope, sympathetic Voice out of an Unknown Darkness?

Very sincerely,
YOUR FRIEND

GREEN HILL
October 1, In-the-evening,

Diary dear, I have written Richard Warren that our acquaintance must remain a pen-and-paper one. It is so

much wiser to leave things that way. Once, I would have been tempted. . . . But somehow, now, I am not.

Adeline, Dr. Denton's cook, arrived this morning armed with one of her inimitable chocolate cakes, and a note from her wretched employer. I received her rather coldly, I am afraid; but I have not yet recovered from the cap-setting incident. However, she is a disarming creature, and the cake, which in part graced my luncheon tray, was delicious. I can't offer you any, but I can set down for your amusement the accompanying script.

GREEN HILL
October 1st

My dear Miss Carroll:

As I have a number of messages to deliver to you from our mutual friend, Penny, and also a matter which I wish to personally discuss with you, may I invite myself to tea this afternoon? I have ascertained, you see, that your father will be in the city!

In a professional capacity, I am able to go and come as I please. But as this call is quite unprofessional in character, and partakes somewhat of the nature of an armed truce, I do not feel that I can come without your consent.

Adeline will wait for your answer. I am, meantime, scouring the town for a white flag.

Yours very sincerely,
WILLIAM DENTON

I must confess, Diary, to a seizure of acute curiosity. Weakly, I bade Adeline tell her master to wait on me at four, and sending for Sarah ordered extra tea with which to placate the savage appetite of my self-bidden guest. We had tea out-of-doors, for October has come in like

a spring day, warm and clear and beautiful. I was in my hammock, whither Sarah and Father had conveyed me at three, just before Father's train left Green Hill, and had therefore an hour of speculation. And it was not without a certain thrill of excitement that I saw a tall, lean figure swing across the lawn towards me, and appropriate the low chair beside me and the tea table.

"Good afternoon," I said politely.

"Good afternoon," he answered, "it was nice of you to let me come."

Wiggles, a sixth doggie sense telling him I had a caller, came racing across to us from the kitchen garden, where I have no doubt he had been destructively employed, and greeted the Doctor with an exaggerated display of cordiality. When he was disposed of finally, under my visitor's chair, "Lovely day," I proffered, one hand concealing a tiny yawn.

"Lovely!" agreed Dr. Denton, enthusiastically.

Conversation languished. Died.

Finally, the silence becoming quite unbearable, I stole a look at the enemy. His lips were pursed in a noiseless whistle, his hands were informally in his pocket, and his eyes were dancing. It is disconcerting that I should have to acknowledge his extreme good looks. I never did care much for good-looking men, anyway. They're so disgustingly conceited. And Dr. Denton possesses an almost spectacular combination of features, coloring, and build.

"Did you speak?" he asked gently.

"I did not!" said I, with emphasis.

"Don't shoot," begged the Unwelcome One. "I'll come down. Or," he asked anxiously, "can you see the whites of my eyes?"

I laughed. I couldn't help it. The situation was so perfectly ridiculous. And so, we laughed together.

Sarah, beaming, appeared with tea and cookies and cake.

"Please pour," I said to Dr. Denton, "and please have some of your own cake. Thank you," I added carefully, "for sending it to us."

"Oh, I didn't send it," he answered cheerfully, manipulating china and silver with dexterity. "It was Adeline's thought. Merely, she asked my permission."

"Oh!" I said, in a small voice, and accepted a cup of tea.

Dr. Denton fed Wiggles cake, and engaged him in loud conversation.

I scalded my throat on tea, and promptly dropped the cup. This, at least, created some diversion. Dr. Denton sprang up, scattering Wiggles, cups, napkins, and spoons with equal indifference, and mopped up the deluge.

"Did you hurt yourself?" he asked, in quite an agonized tone.

"No," I replied, dripping, "but I have burned my throat most awfully. I'm afraid I shan't be able to talk for quite a while."

"May I see?" spoke the physician, with solicitude.

I put out my tongue very soberly.

Dr. Denton returned hastily to his chair.

"You spoke," I suggested, "in your note, of messages."

"Did I?" he returned, in a puzzled tone. "It must be my handwriting. No doctor writes intelligibly."

This was really too much. I beat with my fist upon the unoffending hammock, and asked, "Has your friend . . . ?"

"Gone? Yes, very unfortunately. He had, as I reminded him, a pressing engagement in town. I, myself, took him to the train," concluded the aggravating creature proudly.

"How nice of you," I said heartily, "but you must miss him."

"Intolerably."

The duologue showed symptoms of declining again.

Finally,

"Did you want to see me?" I asked courteously.

"Not particularly," he replied, "but under the white flag, as I suggested, I wanted to make a partial treaty with you, with, of course, your consent."

"I am listening," I said cautiously.

Suddenly he moved his chair nearer, crossed his legs, and lay back, hands locked across his knees.

"Look here," he said, "isn't it time that we declared ourselves in open battle? This guerilla warfare . . ." he paused, suggestively, and I waited.

"You have made it very plain," he went on, "that you do not like me. Perhaps I am putting it mildly. At all events, as your medical adviser, I am forced to inflict my presence frequently upon you. Your father likes me. Sarah likes me; Wiggles likes me. Couldn't you," he asked earnestly, "try to overcome your aversion, for the sake of the majority?"

I considered.

"I think not," I said finally.

"Very well. Having appealed to your filial respect, your better self, there is nothing to do but ask you to sign a temporary armistice. For I am beginning to find your concentrated attack rather . . . wearing."

I smiled.

"I wish," said Dr. Denton carefully, "to give you every opportunity to humiliate and infuriate me. I have always believed a little aversion to be an excellent beginning to matrimony. I don't suppose," he continued hopefully, "that by way of simplifying things you would care to marry me?"

He bit into a large sugar cookie reflectively.

"Marry!" I shouted, sitting bolt upright. I can do it now, Diary, if the occasion demands.

"Marry," said he, with the utmost calmness, but with twinkling eyes.

I collapsed.

"I think you are perfectly insane," I began. And then ceased, for want of words.

Dr. Denton sighed.

"I was afraid I couldn't persuade you," he said. "Let us pass to the next point."

I was still gasping, like a fish.

"You find your throat better with your mouth open?" he asked, with interest.

I closed it with a snap. And kept it closed.

"As my wife," he remarked, "you would have ample opportunities for delicate and refined torture. However. . . . You have called me, perhaps rightly, a 'brute.' Am I to infer that you still continue to regard me in that unflattering light."

I nodded. Speech, by now, was wholly beyond me.

"And I," he went on, "have intimated what I, as an honest man, think of you. It is quite plain that I do not like you any better than you like me. You have, I think, the makings of a rather nice girl. But I have never cared for . . . kittens. Now that we are agreed to disagree, Miss Carroll, will you shake hands with me, and for the

sake of our enforced relationship, pledge yourself neither to stab me in the back or bite me, when I am not looking? When you are quite well again, I am at your mercy. But until then, I must entreat you not to hamper your recovery, and blast my medical reputation, by consistently opposing me at every turn. Are you willing to play friends with me until such time when I can set you on your feet?"

He held out his hand and smiled. The whole thing was ridiculous, and he had been unnecessarily insulting. And yet . . . it was a nice smile, Diary. I have even seen my Peterkins smile just like that, hopefully, ingratiatingly. And after all, I do owe him so much.

Silently I laid my hand in his.

"Good!" said he, gripping it. "And tomorrow you are going to sit up, in a real, substantial chair. After that, you'll be walking before you know it."

The silly tears came to my eyes.

"I am grateful . . ." I faltered.

"Don't be," he said cheerfully, "if you dislike the sensation. It's all in the interest of science, you know."

He snapped his fingers at Wiggles, and got up to go.

'I'm going for Sarah," he said, "you must be taken back to your room now. It's getting chilly."

Once having established me in my room, Dr. Denton bent over me.

"And," he said, very much under his breath, "won't you consider my proposal? I meant it, you know!"

And then he had gone.

I'd like to accept him, out of spite, Diary. And, never having expected a proposal, I find even this one somehow exciting.

Diary, if only you could talk!

CHAPTER VII

GREEN HILL
October 14

Diary, it is quite two weeks since I have made an entry, but the thrills of actually sitting up, in a big chair, downstairs in front of a seasonable log fire, and the even more exciting adventure of short wheel-chair rides in the sheltered paths of a chrysanthemum garden, have for the moment entirely occupied my time and thoughts. Even to the exclusion of you! And now, Father is talking of taking me South for the winter. Just as soon as I am able to walk a little, he wants to take me — and Sarah — and Wiggles — to Florida, so that I need not undergo the trials of a Northern winter.

I am worried about Father. He does not look, and is not, at all well. The old trouble, which dates back to his Spanish-American War days, has returned, and with it, disquieting heart symptoms. I got Dr. Mac off in a corner, lately, and asked him to tell me truly what he thought of Father's condition. "He seems so *tired* all the time," I said. And Dr. Mac looked very grave.

"Lassie," he told me, "Your father's a sick man. And a careless one. He's not minded his own aches and pains all these years, nor spared himself. And he's not as young as he was."

When I said something to Father, he laughed at me.

"MacAllister is an old woman," he said, "fussing and fretting. I'll be all right presently, my little girl. Don't worry. The main thing is to get you on your feet, and

then we'll be off to Florida for a long, long holiday. Bless that boy!" he added, and I knew that he meant Dr. Denton.

Well, I bless him too, when Sarah wheels me down the garden paths and I reach out to touch the big friendly flowers. I feel so strong, so strong! They have to watch me now, for I am like to do all manner of foolish things, with the old languor gone, and the new red blood singing through my veins.

But when Doctor Denton comes and looks at me out of those cool eyes, and asks, "Well, how are the tantrums lately, Miss Carroll?" I'm in no mood for blessing him then!

GREEN HILL
October 20

Oh! Oh! Diary, if you ever go automobiling, you'll never be content to sit in my desk drawer again. It's too wonderful! This morning, bundled up to my eyes, I was taken from my chair, lifted into Mr. John Denton's great, grey, purring beast, and with Dr. William Denton at the wheel, and Father and Mr. Denton beside me, I was taken, quietly and smoothly, over the hill road, down the valley, and through the wide Meadow Road, on my first tour of exploration.

Eleven years! Eleven years!

Back through the village we came, after an all too short half-hour. Somehow the news had spread, and from every gate and window, hands waved and friendly faces peered. They were glad to see me, the Green Hill people.

"Is she crying?" asked Dr. Denton at the wheel, with interest.

I wanted to. I wanted to cry and laugh and shout all at once. Instead I folded my hands more tightly in Father's and said demurely, "Sorry, but she isn't."

Dr. Denton nodded, slouched down in his seat, his strong brown hands doing marvellous things to the wheel.

"Please," I asked Mr. Denton, "next time you take me riding, will you drive, and may I sit in the front seat and watch you steer?"

Everyone laughed.

"Ask Bill," answered my old friend, "I've just sold him the car."

"You may ride in the front seat — with me," announced Dr. Denton graciously, before I had time to withdraw my request, "always providing that you do as you did six minutes back," he added, "when that not clutch my arm at inopportune moments, or scream mongrel pup appeared on the horizon, a good mile away."

"I don't think," I said, "that, after all, I'd care for the front seat."

"Very well," said the chauffeur obligingly, as, with a turn and twist we rolled up smoothly before my own front door, where Sarah, apron flying in the wind, stood, the tears shining on her dear old face.

Front seat or back, I am to ride every day, as long as the good weather holds, for it has been prescribed for me by no less than two physicians in reputable professional standing, no matter what their respective dispositions. And, Diary, I love it so that, for the sake of the swift silent motion, I would cheerfully ride in any seat whatsoever, regardless of the driver. So low have I sunk in my new passion.

"Nervous?" asked Dr. Denton, as he helped carry me

to my room. I am conveyed now as children are, on crossed hands with supporting arms about my back.

"Not at all!" I answered indignantly.

"That's good," said he, "for I am a fearsome driver. I have," he said, sinking his voice to an awe-inspiring whisper, "been known to kill my men in my day. And any amount of dogs. Strong men as I pass have turned pale, and women fainted on the streets!"

He and Mr. Denton laid me on my bed, and I could only look at him with scorn, from that ignominious position. Oh, when I can stand on my two feet, won't I — well, won't I *just*!!!!

GREEN HILL
November 1

Diary, this day I have stood upright, and taken my first faltering step forward. Dr. Mac was there, and Dr. Denton, one on each side. And a step away, with his arms wide, my Father. Sarah, her hand on Dr. Mac's arm, took the step with me. She was quite white.

I was terribly weak, and all bendy in the middle. But I walked, Diary, I *walked*.

I am in bed now, after having been fussed over and made much of. I am sure Father is out sending wires! And Sarah pops in every two minutes to see if I am still alive. I am very much alive, and my whole soul is on its knees in gratitude. Now, almost for the first time, I believe that I am to be a cog in the Great Machinery again; and no longer a little broken thing, thrown out forever on the scrap heap.

I want to tell Richard Warren. But no word has come from him since my last letter. So I must wait.

GREEN HILL
December 8

It seems a year since I last opened you, little Blue Friend. For so much has happened. I walk, as if I had always walked, and it no longer seems wonderful or blessed. For my Father is very ill. He is up and dressed and around, but I know and he knows that it may not be for very long. He has been to town, to see other doctors. And when he came back, he set his house in order.

After he had told me his exact condition, "Mavis," he said, "you are the bravest person, except your Mother, I have ever known. It may be that I shall live for years; it may be that it is only a matter of weeks or months. I don't know. The doctors hold out very little hope of my recovery. You are better fitted to help me now than ever you were. And," he said smiling, "it seems as if I had nothing more to live for, now that you are well again, and growing stronger every day."

I was on his lap, in the big still living room.

"Father, father," I said, and held his dear head close against my breast. They can't take him from me! They can't!

"Hush!" he said. "We have had many years of the most beautiful, close companionship together, my daughter. You have given me more than you know. And for a long time I have known..."

He stopped.

"Why didn't you tell me?" I asked, fighting back the tears.

"I talked it over," he said, "with Dr. Denton, and we decided that it was not wise — as your condition stood then.

Always Dr. Denton! Ordering my life . . .

"If only," said Father, very low, "if only I could leave you guarded, protected. You know so little of life . . . I am," he whispered to himself, "responsible to her mother . . . "

We were quiet a long time.

Presently he put me from him.

"There, there," he said, "I hear Peter calling you outside. Run along, dearest. And let me see you smile before you go. It may be that we will have a long time yet together. Kiss me, Mavis, and smile."

Diary, I am so terribly frightened. So alone.

GREEN HILL

December 21

We are getting ready for Christmas. The Green Hill people have sent me, with their love, a beautiful, courageous tree. And everyone has offered to come and trim it. But we must be very quiet on this, my first real Christmas for many years. For Father is failing steadily. He does not complain, but he spends a great deal of the day in bed; and he is so white, so worn, that my heart stands still to look at him. If only I could have stayed all my life in my little rose-grey room, helpless and cared for, if by some strange twist of Fate my Father could have been spared this wasting illness.

I hate my feet; so eager to run; I hate my new sense of well-being and vitality. I hate the faint pink in my cheeks, and all my untired strength.

It is snowing today. White and soft and thick snow lies over my garden. Like a . . . No, I can't write it . . .

GREEN HILL
December 28

Christmas is over and done with. I had so many lovely gifts, more than ever this year, it seems. I have put them away — the books from Mr. Denton, the little gold watch from Father, even Peter's funny little hand-painted card. And all the others. I can't seem to be grateful for anything. Wonderful roses reached me from the city, Christmas morning. There is no card. But I know who sent them. Why doesn't he write? He would help, a little, I think. But I can't write to him. Not now.

GREEN HILL
January 1

The new year.

I ran over to see Mrs. Goodrich this morning. She is terribly distressed because Mr. Goodrich's firm is sending him abroad, and he wants her to go with him. They will be travelling too much to take Peter and have decided against it. Of course I asked for him. And she will let me know. Father, when I told him, shook his head. He said nothing, but I knew what he was thinking..

GREEN HILL
January 2

Father asked me today if I liked Dr. Denton. He asked me so wistfully and so strangely that I couldn't tell him the truth. They are great friends, I know. So I lied.

"Why, yes," I said, "I like him very much."

I felt myself grow red. Father patted my hand.

"He's a good man," he said. "I want you to trust

him, Mavis. I have made John Denton your guardian — you know so little about money and the dull things of life," he added, half sighing, half smiling. "You are, after all, only a child."

I tried to change the subject, as I always do, when directly or indirectly Father speaks of leaving me. He seemed happier, when I left him, than I have seen him in many days. I am glad, Diary, that I lied to him about the Enemy.

GREEN HILL
January 10

This morning Father was worse. I rushed to the 'phone and tried to get Dr. Mac, but he was out, making his calls. So Dr. Denton came. He sent me from the room, and was with Father a long, long time. When he came out, he called me.

"Your father wishes to see you, Miss Carroll," he said.

"Dr. Denton —" I couldn't say any more. Suddenly he took my two ice-cold hands in his firm, warm grasp.

"Remember," he said, almost sternly, "that I am at your service, always, and at his."

He dropped my hands and turned away.

"I shall be back, he told me, "in the afternoon."

Shaking all over, I laid my hand on the doorknob and prayed, over and over, just "Please, God, help him," and went in.

Father, very white, held out his hands. "Come here," he said. And when I was beside him,

"Mavis," he said, "the thought of leaving you alone — now that I feel certain that I must leave you, is unbearable. I have been talking today with Dr. Denton. He wants to marry you, my dear, and take care of you always, for me. He has been like my own son to me, that

boy. He is straight and true and clean. And I think that I could go on my long journey with very few regrets, my Mavis, if I knew that you were in as safe hands as his."

Cruel! Cruel!

My heart almost stopped, and then raced on again. I couldn't speak. Father, his hand on mine, looked at me wistfully, entreatingly. I couldn't bear to have him look like that. Like a beggar. And yet, for a moment, I had absolutely no impulse of love toward him. He was a stranger to me, my own Father. It was impossible that it was his voice asking me to do this unthinkable thing.

"Mavis?"

"I can't," I said, in a whisper.

His hand loosened from mine. Dropped wearily to the bed,

"Very well, dearest," he said, "of course you shall do nothing against your will. I only thought . . . " he stopped, and then, "It seemed a solution," he finished.

He looked very tired. All my love for him came rushing back. I kissed him, and he held me close for an instant.

"Will you — think it over?" he asked slowly.

"Yes, Father," I said, and was rewarded by his old brilliant smile.

Once out of the room, I brushed past Sarah, hovering near the door, and went to my own room. There, lying on my bed, I "thought it over."

What was it Dr. Denton said to me,— "you owe your father something."

I have cried until I have no tears left, rebellious, sick at heart.

I can't. And yet... if it wou'd make him any happier . . .

The bell is ringing. If that is Dr. Denton, I will see him before he goes to Father.

Late at night.

I have said that I will marry William Denton.

GREEN HILL
January 12

It is only a matter of days with Father now. Dr. Denton told me that, when we had our talk two days ago. He listened to what I had to say, very quietly, standing in front of the fire, his arms crossed, and looking down at the great chair in which I was half buried.

After he had told me about Father, "If you will marry me, Miss Carroll," he said, "I will do my best to carry out your father's wishes. I cannot make you happy — that I know — but I can make you — safe. Until such time as you do not need my protection."

"What do you mean?" I asked him.

"I mean," he answered gravely, "that you are very young and that the abnormal life which your accident forced you to lead has peculiarly unfitted you for any solitary encounter with the world. If you would trust yourself to me, I promise faithfully to care for you, to watch over you, and to help you through the first bewildering time. After that — you may dispose of me as you see fit."

"You mean?" I whispered again.

He smiled, sombrely. "I am not trying to bind you

to me," he said. "I am asking you for your Father's sake, to let me take care of you for a time. When you are quite strong, and quite able to look out for yourself, it will remain for me to step aside, and you will be free to do and go as you please."

Something of hope stirred faintly in me. "You will let me go then?"

"Certainly."

I laid my face against the soft cushions of the chair.

"Marriage," I said, under my breath, "I — I —"

I couldn't go on.

"It will not be," he said very gently, "a marriage, Miss Carroll. It will be a business arrangement. You may have my sacred word of honor that I will not trouble you in any way. And that as soon as possible I will take the steps to make you quite free again."

I stood up and faced him.

"You think that Father really wishes this?" I asked.

"It is, I know, his heart's desire," said Dr. Denton, "and I am tremendously honored by his faith in me."

"Very well," I said, and held out my hand.

Silently, he took it.

"Thank you, Mavis," he said quietly.

I was conscious of a longing to escape; it was as if a fine silken cord were tightening about me.

"Shall we go to Father?" I asked him.

Without another word we two walked from the room.

"Remember," he said to me at the door, "this is for your father. We must make believe for him, you and I."

I nodded.

The door closed behind us.

GREEN HILL
January 20

I am to be married tomorrow. It is Father's wish. He is weaker, but suffers no pain, and he recognizes us all.

Twenty-four hours to my wedding. Please God that Father will never know how I dread it.

Mr. John Denton is to give me away. And we are to be married from this house, with no one but the Goodriches and Mr. Denton present at the ceremony. Ceremony! The mockery of it!

Dr. Denton has given me a ring. It was his Mother's, he said. I have never asked him about his Mother. I do not even know if he has told her.

Nothing seems to matter very much. Father ... *Father*...

January 21

William — he has asked me to call him that — came to me this morning, and for the first time in days we talked together for more than a moment.

"You are frightened," he said to me, "and nervous. You need not be."

"Why — why are you marrying me?" I asked him suddenly.

"Why are *you* marrying me?" he countered.

"Father," I said, and stopped.

He nodded.

"I, too," he said simply.

All at once I realized what a tremendous sacrifice he was making. I tried, very poorly, to tell him.

"Not at all," he assured me, "I am perfectly clear as

to what I am doing. And my own motives. I shall be, after all," he added, "perfectly free — except perhaps outwardly."

There was something in his voice . . . I got to my feet.

"Very well," I said, "it is understood that we are both free? Except perhaps outwardly?"

I do not think he liked it.

January 21

This afternoon, at four, I was married to Dr. William Denton, in the room next door to Father's. They let me see him right afterwards; and he put his dear thin white hand on my forehead and smiled.

William has moved over to the house to be near Father, and after the grave congratulations of our few friends, we were alone together in the quiet house. Married. And as far apart as Pole from Pole. Diary, you who have guarded my girlhood so jealously, it is Good-by now. I have come to the end of the chapter. And there will be nothing in my future life that I shall want to record. There is only this:

Uncle John brought me today a letter. From Richard Warren. I opened it ten minutes ago, alone in my room. It was a short letter. It asked if he might come to me; it said that he had loved me all these months; it was signed, "Your Lover, Richard Warren."

It came too late, dear Diary. I will lay it among your pages, with my dreams and my hopes and my sorrow.

Good-by. With a very steady hand, I, by some mysterious alchemy of the Law and the Church, Mrs. William Denton, write this last word on your pages.

Finis

CHAPTER VIII

The last word had been written in my Diary. Wearily, I stood erect and brushed the loosened hair from my eyes. The house was very still; in all my life I had never been so utterly alone. I turned from my desk, and, as I did so, caught a glimpse of my face in the wall-mirror. That was not I — that white-faced girl, with the frightened eyes and shaken mouth.

"Mavis . . . "

I saw the mirrored eyes grow dark, the tremulous mouth straighten into lines of control before I left my curiously impersonal scrutiny of myself and opened the door for my husband.

"Well?"

"Your father is awake," said Bill, very tall and broad-shouldered on the threshold. "I have been trying to persuade him to have a nurse, but he won't listen to me."

"Sarah is better than any hospital graduate," I answered, "and I am quite strong enough to be with him now."

"As you wish," he answered gently. "But I think you over-estimate your strength, my dear."

I walked past him into the hall.

"Sarah has prepared the guest room for you," I said. "It is next door to father."

"Thank you."

He walked with me to the door of the sick-room, stood aside and let me enter alone. Father was still conscious,

he knew me, tried to raise his hand. I put mine over it and sat for the rest of the afternoon by his bed. Sometimes he seemed to sleep, and I watched him with a passion of sorrow and love unlike anything I had ever known. All his defences were down, all his barriers of reserve. He was like a child, and, I thought, quietly happy and at peace. It is difficult to set down on paper how I yearned over him as the slow hours dragged by. But when Sarah came to relieve me and I rose, stiff and cramped from long sitting, I was conscious that, somehow, I had come to grips with myself, had seen for the first time what I owed to my father, had realized fully his sacrifice and his unfailing thought of me. It was as if we had talked together, we two, a long intimate hour. And I knew then, as never before, that I owed him not duty nor obedience, for those are unloving words, but tenderness and endless gratitude. If before he left me forever, my marriage was the one thing to bring him peace, then no matter how mistaken his love for me had been in that instance, I had been more than right to do for him as he wished. The fact that in so doing I had probably ruined two lives, was of minor consideration.

Two days went by. On the evening of the second, the doctors held out very little hope that my father would live through the night. I watched with them until morning. I had no tears left. I had come to a place where no tears were, a place too deep to be stirred by emotion or even grief.

As the dawn came in, pale and cold, Dr. McAllister turned from the bed and took his hand from father's wrist. He looked old and grey — dear Doctor Mac, but his eyes were radiant.

"He'll pull through!" he said simply.

All about me was a singing darkness. Through it I heard a voice say sharply, "Look to the lassie, Bill!" and felt strong arms around me. Before I lost complete consciousness I remember putting up my hand to brush something wet from my face. Tears? Not *my* tears.

"Don't cry," I said childishly. "It hurts father to see people cry."

When I woke again it was bright daylight. I was in my own room on my own bed. My husband was sitting, his hands between his knees, beside me.

For a moment I stared at him. Then, as knowledge flashed through me like a terrifying tide,

"Father?" I questioned, very low.

"He's all right, Mavis," said Dr. Denton quietly. "The danger is past — thank God!"

I put out my hand, gropingly, and he took it firmly into his.

"Cry now," he said gently. "It will help."

Then, in a rush, came the healing, peace-giving tears.

It was not until ten days later, when father, marvellously recuperating, sat up for the first time and demanded his "children" about him that I faced the fact that what was done could not be undone, and that I was confronted by the finality of marriage.

"Well, you two," said father weakly, but with a tiny glimmer of mischief in his eyes, "it looks as if I had hurried you before the altar under false pretences. What are you going to do about it — now that I've fooled you by living?"

Beneath his half-laughter, I heard a note of anxiety, of doubt. And the resolution rose up strong and com-

pelling within me that never, as long as I lived, should father know what he had done. It was the only way in which I could pay my debt.

"Play the game, Mavis," I said to myself, and smiled straight into father's eyes.

Bill, sitting beside me, drew a long breath. Was it relief? I glanced at him quickly and knew that for one moment we agreed.

"You old matchmaker," I said, "were you so afraid that I would never find a husband? Was it quite necessary to frighten us all to pieces in order that I should wear a wedding ring?"

Father laughed.

"Then," he asked, "It's all right — with you two?"

I turned to Bill and saw him nod once before I spoke.

"It's all right," I said, "and we're all happy."

"Thank God!" said father under his breath.

I could not bear the look on his face, and slipped blindly, without excuse, from the room.

It was the following week that John Denton came down to be with us, and hatched his plans with father. They called us in, Bill and me, and laid their schemes before us.

"We have decided," said father, very thin and pale in his armchair, "that children are best left alone, without old people to disturb them. I'm quite all right. In two weeks I shall be younger and better than I have been in twenty years. And I want you and Bill to go away, Mavis. It's time you had your honeymoon, cloudless and solitary, as all honeymoons should be. Old John here has been talking his camp in Canada to me, for an hour steady. And I'm persuaded. I'll get you infants out of the house, and then John and I and that

marvelous man-servant of his who is cook and nurse and valet in one person will travel by easy stages and spend a month rusticating in the big woods.

"Can't we go too?" I begged, in a sudden panic.

"You can *not*!" said Uncle John and father in one breath.

I turned a little helplessly to my husband.

"They don't want us!" I said.

"And we don't want them!" he answered smiling. "You and I are going to Cuba. Just as soon as you can get ready. I've been talking to your father and he agrees with me that the absolute change will do you all the good in the world."

"Cuba!"

"Exactly. There is a perfectly good plantation there just waiting for us."

"But . . ." I said, sparring for time, "I couldn't leave Sarah."

Father laughed outright. "You baby!" he said, caressingly.

"You won't have to," said Bill. "She needs a rest as much as you do. She's coming along — and so is your friend Peter. We can't leave him behind, and Mr. Goodrich has to sail for Spain sooner than he expected. I saw him this morning."

I was too amazed for words. And over my defenceless head the affair was settled. Canada for father and Uncle John; Cuba for Sarah, Peter, Bill, and me. A thousand protests, the old rebellious anger at having my life settled and ordered for me, rushed over me again. But father's eyes were on me and I choked back my resentment.

"Cuba it is!" I said, forcing a smile.

And so, after the maze of packing, of sending Sarah to New York for summer clothes — in the dead of winter!— after the farewells and the blessings and the thought-deadening hurry and bustle — Cuba it was.

CHAPTER IX

It was decided that my husband and I should go to New York by motor, spending the night with his uncle, Peter and Sarah to join us the following day, so that the last packing could be leisurely attended to before we sailed.

I had my farewells with father alone. Dr. Denton went in first and came out looking more moved than I believed possible. If I could have liked him at all, it would have been for his devotion to my father.

I can't write about how dear father was when he told me good-by.

John Denton went up to town with us. I begged him to, and he very naturally attributed my nervousness and pallor to the long strain of my father's illness. He was very good to me.

Leaving my house, in a sense for the first time, and knowing it would be months before I saw it again, I experienced a sinking of the heart that was terrible. Not till then had I realized how much my home meant to me, how much freedom had been mine beneath it's little roof, how lovingly the friendly walls had safeguarded and sheltered me.

At the door, I clung first to Mrs. Goodrich and then, for a long, close moment, to Sarah. She seemed a rock of strength, the last familiar landmark. But strong hands drew me away from her, and presently I was in the closed car, and we were off for New York.

I had very little sensation: only a feeling of great

numbness and a consciousness that if I could know any emotion it would be that of an infinite despair. I was dimly grateful that I need not go by train. In this, at least, they had humored me. All through the long ride, I sat huddled in the new furs which were Uncle John's wedding gift to me, my eyes closed, and my hand in John Denton's warm clasp. I did not hear what the two men said to one another. Possibly, when they spoke to me, I answered. I do not know.

Something of the terrifying maelstrom of the city traffic penetrated my stupor as we came smoothly into town. It was all so new . . . the noise and rush and bewilderment of it. The lights were beginning to flare up all about me: faces seen in the crowds struck at me like a blow. Such hungry, restless, seeking faces . . . But here and there, the happy eyes of a girl clinging to a man's arm, or walking alone with her dreams, stood out for me, and brought the tears to my eyes. Wearily I thought, if I could only cry again — for it seemed so long since I had known the release of tears.

I must have fainted when we reached the house, for the next thing I remember is waking up in a great, wide bed, in a huge, high-ceilinged room, with a kindly, round old woman fussing over me.

"You're to lie still, dearie," she said, as I tried to sit up, "and have a bite of supper on a tray. 'Tis the Doctor's orders, ma'am," and she smiled at me with a certain shy sweetness, and tucked a billowy eiderdown quilt more closely about my feet. I discovered then that I was undressed and surrounded by hot-water bottles.

I tried to thank her, but words were difficult. I was so very tired.

Someone knocked.

"It's himself, surely," said the old woman, as she hastened to open, and then stood aside, her hands beneath her apron, to let my husband come in. He thanked her, dismissed her, and came straight to my bedside, where he stood looking down at met.

I drew the clothes tight about my throat and looked at him mutely.

"How do you feel?" he asked, retrieving one of my submerged hands and placing a steady finger on the pulse.

"Tired," I answered, and then, "Oh, Doctor Denton, when will Sarah be here?"

I knew quite well: but something unreasonable in me hoped that I had slept a whole tweny-four hours away and that I would very soon hear her comforting step outside my door.

"Tomorrow," he answered, and added with a suspicion of a smile, "but I thought we were agreed that Doctor Denton, as a form of address, is taboo, under the circumstances."

"William, then," I said, with a great weariness in my heart.

"Could you manage Bill?" he asked. "I have unpleasant associations with my full name: it always reminds me of the woodshed, and my father's strong right hand."

Absurdly enough, I heard my own voice saying solemnly:

"Father called me William, Mother called me Will,
Sister called me Willie, but the fellers called me Bill."

I stopped suddenly, wondering if I were going quite

mad. But there was reassuring laughter in the eyes bent upon me.

"Exactly," he said, gravely.

I attempted to laugh. It was a very poor effort, and ended in tears.

Dr. Denton sat down on the bed and took me into his arms, pressing my head against his shoulder. I didn't care. I cried there very comfortably, for a long time.

"It's all right," I heard his voice saying, coming, so it seemed, from a great distance. "It's all right. You'll feel lots better for it, Mavis."

After a while, I dried my eyes and lay back against the pillows again. The intolerable burden about my heart had eased a little, in some miraculous manner.

"And now," announced my husband, "Mrs. Cardigan is going to bring you some supper. After that, she will make you comfortable for the night, and you are to drink what I send you. Uncle John sends his love and the demand that you pour his coffee for him in the morning, or, if you do not feel strong enough, you are to stay in bed, he says, and he will come up and pour yours! And I shall be next door to you, if you want anything in the night. But I am sure that you are going to sleep soundly."

He rose and looked down on me once more.

"Good night," he said. "Sleep well."

"Good night," I answered, "Dr.— B-B-Bill!"

His eyes twinkled, just for a moment.

"Good night," he responded, "Miss — M-M-Mavis!"

He opened the door for Mrs. Cardigan and her tray, stood aside, waved to me once, and was gone. All the way down the hall I heard him singing: "You

are old, Father William" in a pleasant, gay baritone.

Suddenly I realized I was hungry.

I awoke the following morning feeling almost happy. There was a wonderful sense of adventure in looking out of my windows over the grey city streets, in hearing the hurrying footsteps go past me. So many people! So many sorrows and joys passing beneath my window, so many eager feet going out to meet the day! I felt very small, almost insignificant, very unimportant.

"It's like an angel you're looking today, Mrs. Denton!" said Mrs. Cardigan amiably, as she brought me my breakfast, with Uncle John following hard on her heels.

"And it's blushing she is!" added the honest creature in amazement.

Uncle John laid his hand on the shoulder of the old woman who had been nurse and housekeeper and almost-mother to him for thirty years.

"Run off with you, Mary," he said, laughing. "Mrs. Denton isn't used to blarney!"

"And her with the fine young husband!" said Mrs. Cardigan in obvious astonishment as she backed to the door.

Uncle John looked at me with laughing eyes: but I could not meet his glance.

The rest of the day is more or less of a blur to me now. Sarah came, with Peter and Wiggles. It was a matter for debate, which of the two last mentioned was the more excited. But it is certain that Peter talked more. His ideas of Cuba were wonderful and strange, and it was only by dint of dire threats of being left on the dock that we finally persuaded him to go to bed.

The following morning, February tenth, with the thermometer flirting with zero, we sailed for Cuba.

Sarah and I had connecting cabins: and I bribed a blonde, friendly steward to let me conceal Wiggles behind locked doors and thus keep him with us. On the other side of me, Dr. Denton was housed with Peter. All the cabins were full of flowers and fruit and books, and I am sure that, although I may have concealed it better, I was quite as excited as Peter and the pup.

It was, they tell me, a rough passage. Somehow, I didn't seem to mind. To lie in a deck-chair, muffled to the eyes, and to watch the ocean seemed all that I wanted in life. I never tired of it. Grey and green and blue, as the fog or the sun caught it, there was never anything as wonderful as my first sight of the sea. I was even glad of the storms that delayed us longer than usual For, even beyond Cape Hatteras, we had wind, and snow and cold. And then came a day when, little by little, people began to crawl greenly up from their cabins, shed their sweaters, and take an interest in life. Sarah among them. Poor dear, she had succumbed almost before we left the dock! Every dip of the boat, every rising and falling swell was met by her with the gloomy announcement that she wanted to die. Once, when I peered in at her, I found my husband sitting by her berth and answering quite gravely, her innumerable questions as to how they conducted burials at sea. Were they conducted "with decent Christian rites?" she was demanding weakly.

As I walked the deck with him, braced against the salt wind, my hair flying under my fur cap,

"You shouldn't tease Sarah!" I said indignantly.

"Shouldn't I?" he asked, forcibly restraining Peter from going over the rail — shouting, "I see a mermaid, Aunt Mavis!" "Perhaps not. But to the good sailor,

seasickness is always a matter, inexplicable and humorous."

"By the way, I'm glad," he continued, "that you've stood the trip so well. It would be a pity," said he pensively, "to have injected into the romance of a honeymoon the very mundane element of mal-de-mer . . . "

I turned on my heel to leave him, but reckoned without the tremendous wave which swung lazily up to the boat, smote it, held it suspended a breathless moment, and then let it down again with unparalleled suddenness. My husband's arm intervened between me and the rail, checking my mad career in mid-air.

"Steady on," he said. "We've not reached tropical waters yet."

There was nothing to do but take his proffered arm and walk on, in haughty silence.

We sat at the Captain's table, and for the greater part of the trip we and the Captain sat there alone. No, not quite alone, for at the Captain's right sat the prettiest girl I have ever seen. We met her the first day out, and it was not long before she had attached herself to our party. Peter, always susceptible to beauty, caused me not a few pangs of jealousy before the trip was over. And Miss Mercedes Howell, for such was her mismated name, seemed to find much in common with my husband. She had thought at first, she confided to me naïvely, that the Doctor and I must be brother and sister despite the passenger list, and at all events, we must have been married a long, long time — was it not so, dear Mrs. Denton?

On my stately assurance that I had been married less than a week, her enormous black eyes flew open to their widest. I changed the subject.

Miss Howell, so her vivacious chatter informed us, was returning to Havana after a period of college. I gathered that by the edict of the faculty she had gone through Vassar in two years instead of the prescribed four.

"Oh, but it was dull," she told us at the table, with melting, melancholy eyes. "No young men! Nothing! Just stupid books and rules — rules — rules!! It was like prison! Imagine!"

And she looked brightly about the board for sympathy. If I had a momentary sense of sympathy, it was for the faculty, but evidently my husband and the Captain felt otherwise.

Mercedes, as she insisted I should call her, extending the courtesy to the entire family, and, as a matter of course, addressing me as Mavis and the remainder of the party as Peter and Bill, was the daughter of a wealthy American, settled in Cuba with a Spanish wife. She was twenty, and on returning to Cuba, was to make her debut. I was tremendously interested by her vivid account of Cuban Society, and went to bed each night with my head a whirl of horse races, and parties and country clubs and motor trips.

Her chaperone being confined to her cabin, Mercedes found that, after I had retired it was quite providential that she should keep "Billy" pleasantly occupied on deck until such time as she should elect to go to bed. I must say that my husband advanced no serious objections. And when we parted on the docks at Havana, Mercedes escaped from her wan and weary attendant long enough to assure us all of her undying affection and to impart to us the pleasing information that Guayabal, whither we were bound, was quite near Havana, and that

we could expect to see her often. I am afraid I was not very cordial. She was rather a dear, and superlatively, almost superfluously, pretty, but she made my head ache, and beside her youth and evervescence I felt curiously old.

Entering the harbor was something I shall never forget. The blue water and the sun on the white and mauve and pink houses, and the shining fortress of Morro castle rising up from the bay. Bill told me something of its history, as we leaned over the rail and watched the approach. And a sense of horror took hold of me, in the warmth and sunlight, as I thought of the torture chamber and the silenced screams of the prisoners . . .

And that is why, I suppose, my first impression of Cuba was one of beauty and cruelty, warmth and color and the dark, swift treachery of by-gone ages.

The landing, the inspection, the docks, passed in a blur. Sarah, pale and miserable, sat on a trunk with Peter and watched her alien surroundings with unfriendly eyes. But it was not long before we were hustled away and into a long, luxurious open car, driven by a lean, hawk-eyed person who greeted us in an unmistakable Yankee twang, bless him, and seemed unfeignedly glad to see us.

"This is Silas, Mavis," my husband informed me, "chauffeur extraordinary, Jack-of-all-trades, and overseer-in-particular to my friend, Harry Reynolds. And this, Silas," he said, quite impressively, "is Mrs. Denton!"

I shook hands and presented Sarah, who brightened visibly at the home-touch, and after we were settled, with Peter and Wiggles and innumerable bags stowed in the

front seat with Silas, I drew a deep breath and watched Havana slide by, gay with color, its narrow streets crowded, under a heavenly blue sky.

We ran along the low sea-wall, and passing parks and wonderful stone edifices which seemed too fairy-like to be called houses, we were soon leaving the outsskirts far behind us. Before us stretched a long, wide, white road, thick with fine, sharp dust.

"We're climbing," said my husband, "you'll notice the change of air soon, for Guayabal is in a mountain district."

I hardly heard him. I was too busy watching the various family groups as we went through the villages. It was all so incongruous: here, a marvellous house that might have belonged to some foreign Prince — there, huddled at its very gate, a cluster of huts, thatched, and sun-baked; and brown babies all over the landscape, very naked, very dirty and, from a distance at least, wholly enchanting. And then the trees! The tall, royal palms, with the afternoon wind in them!

"Oh-h!" I said, as we passed a clump of wonderful scarlet blossoms, "what is it?"

Sarah was exclaiming too, sitting perfectly upright and rigid beside me.

"Hibiscus," answered our companion. "You'll find lots of it where we are going."

The villages went by. A crimson sun was glowing over the palms, and almost before I had seen it, it was gone, and a violet after-glow was coloring distant hill-tops. I clasped my hands in my lap and wondered if ever there had been anything as lovely and remote. And it was with a sense of absolute shock that I heard

and saw Silas snap on the lights of the car and realized that now the after-glow had gone and that the heavy Southern night had closed in around us.

"Why, there isn't any twilight," I said, in childish disappointment.

"Not here," answered my husband, "Nature strikes suddenly and swiftly in the tropics. She has no half-tones, no compromise . . . "

Even in the dark I could feel his glance at me. I said nothing.

When we entered the village of Guayabal and drove up the winding roadway through the gates and into the drive, the stars were shining. Very close they seemed, and tremendous—"as big as dinner plates," as Sarah put it to me afterwards, with obvious disapproval. And they were warm, almost fragrant, I fancied, unlike our cold, high, impersonal stars of the North. They frightened me . . .

The lights shone out from a low, long house as the car stopped under a portico. Two smiling Chinese housemen were standing, ready to take our bags, and my heart sank as I thought of what Sarah—who contributes so religiously to foreign missions—must be thinking. It was with relief, therefore, that I saw the unmistakable Hibernian face of the cook at the door. The domestic staff consisted then, of Wing and Fong and Norah; and I blessed the Reynolds, that, in assembling their household Lares and Penates, they had included something white and clean and very cordial to preside over the kitchen, for I feared for Sarah's peace of mind . . .

Peter, tired and perhaps somewhat frightened by the strangeness and by the yellow hands raised to lift him down from the car, whimpered a little, and my husband,

jumping out, took the child in his arms and turned to me,

"Welcome," he said, with a certain dignity, "to the Palms."

It was the loveliest house. Even Sarah was moved to favorable comment, and Wiggles went quite mad. We entered through a screened, tile-floored verandah, lamp-lighted, and bright with wicker-ware, to an enormous room. The walls were panelled in dark wood, the floor red-tiled, the ceiling raftered, and it was wide and high and long beyond my wildest dreams of any room. There were tables and books and myriad comfortable chairs all about, and at the far end, a huge fireplace, wherein a little red fire burned comfortably. For as the night came, so came the sudden amazing chill after the day's heat, and I found the warmth and sight of the fire very gratifying. The room was living and dining room in one, Norah explained to me, and showed me hard by the pantry door, the table laid for two. And after my first curiosity had subsided, she took me to my room.

It was many-windowed, and all the windows were barred. Three red steps led up to the alcove where a great bed was set, under an age-old crucifix. And it was gay with chintz and dimities, while against my windows a bourginvilla vine whispered in the wind.

Peter and Sarah were next door, with a bath between, and across the way, my stranger-husband had his own room and bath, as big and odd and delightful as mine. I could hardly sit down or let Sarah brush my hair or even wash the dust of the journey from me for excitement.

Peter, soon undressed and sitting up in bed with a big bowl of bread and milk, was trying heroically to keep his

eyes open. I heard his prayer, answered half a thousand questions as best I could, left him sleeping quietly, and went in search of my — host.

I found him, in a dinner jacket, at the piano, playing something very softly, and with his eyes half-closed. When he heard my step on the tiles, he jumped up.

"I didn't know you played," I said politely, glad that Sarah had persuaded me to change, and conscious of how very becoming the new mauve voile must be.

"I have a number of accomplishments," he answered irritatingly.

I stood for a moment, by the fireplace, the mantel high above my head.

"This is a wonderful house," I said, trying to make conversation. "Tell me something about it."

Dr. Denton drew two big chairs close to the fire and for half an hour told me of his friend, Harry Reynolds, and his delicate little wife, of how they had come to Cuba and built this place of dreams and sent for Silas from Vermont to come and take care of it.

"It is only about a hundred acres," said my companion, "mostly in sugar cane. But Reynolds has plenty of money and they were very happy here. When the youngest boy died of fever, Mrs. Reynolds couldn't stand it any longer. The place had too many associations. So they left, last summer, keeping the servants on, for Harry had to make several flying trips back and forth. And he was glad to let us have the house for a time, until he decided what to do with it. His wife swears she will never come here again: and yet, they are reluctant to sell it. I have spent a number of happy holidays here and so . . . well, it was all most opportune and providential . . .

and I am convinced that the climate will be admirable for you."

He was speaking in his professional tone, and I, nervous and ill-at-ease, was glad to talk of my returning health and of other prosaic matters.

"When you are rested," he said, "in a day or two, we must go into Havana — you will want an account opened there at one of the banks."

That reminded me of something that had been troubling me.

"But it is not my money," I began rather abruptly, and stopped.

"It is," he assured me," Your father has been very generous with you and you need feel under no obligations to me — unless you object to having me play the host a little until — later."

I didn't know what to answer, and blessed Fong's sleek black head, as slippered and silent, he slid in to announce dinner.

Norah had outdone herself for the "new Missis." And it was pleasant in the softly lighted room, with the candles burning on the table, shining across delicate old china and worn silver.

My husband exerted himself to be amusing. Our talk was all give and take, and there were even laughter awaking echoes in the room.

Dinner over, after I had made a face over the strong Cuban, and Bill — it was still so difficult to call him that — had sent out word to Norah that hereafter we would drink the sort of beverage I had been accustomed to, he went to the piano again, and with a little snub-nosed pipe between his teeth, sang ridiculous Bab ballads and

played enchanting snatches of melody while, with Wiggles on my lap, I dreamed before the fire.

Father would have loved it. . . . I missed him terribly.

The music stopped.

"Mavis . . ." he was beside me, something in his hand. I turned, startled.

"I didn't give you a wedding present," he said, half-smiling, "but before we left I had just time to have this made for you."

I took the small, black leather case from his hand and opened it. My father's face looked back at me, wonderfully living. Almost it seemed as if the gentle, strong mouth would smile and speak.

"I had it painted before — before the tide turned," said Bill, "from the picture he gave me."

I closed my hands upon the miniature and my eyes against the tears.

"You are very good," I said falteringly. "I — you couldn't have given me anything I could have cared for more."

He stood, his broad shoulders squared against the mantel, and looked at me gravely.

"I hope," he said and stopped. Then, very evenly, he went on, "I hope you will try to be happy here, Mavis."

Happy! A sudden revulsion of feeling came over me. What use had I for happiness? I had been almost stupified, like an animal in the sun, dreaming vaguely before the fire. But now. . . .

"I will try to be — content," I told him.

His eyes hardened, grew keen and cold again.

"Thank you," he said, not quite sincerely.

We were silent a moment, until Silas came in to get

the orders for the following day. I hardly heard the voices, talking so near me. It mattered so little what they, or anyone, said. I thought of Green Hill, of Peter asleep near me. . . . I thought of father, in his big woods, his old strength coming back to him . . . and I thought of the letter that had reached me on my wedding day . . . my first love letter. I had not answered it. For me, no "lyric hour" could exist. No, nor not even the dream of one. Uncle John, I thought, would have told Richard Warren by now that I was married. Mrs. William Denton. . . .

My thoughts blurred into a half-dream. I was on a ship. Somewhere Mercedes Howell was standing. I heard her calling from far off, "Billy, Billy!"

I awoke suddenly. Silas had gone and my husband was standing near me,

"You called me, Mavis," he was saying.

I looked at him, at the great, strange room, confused and half asleep.

"I was dreaming," I said, and then, "a nightmare."

"Oh, I see!" he laughed a little. "You look like a child," he said slowly, "with the firelight on your yellow hair and that flush in your cheeks."

I rose, tumbling Wiggles unceremoniously to the floor.

"Good-night," I said.

"Good-night," he answered, his hands deep in his pockets, and then, as I turned, "Sleep well, my little Make-Believe-Wife!"

CHAPTER X

I had been asleep for several hours, I fancy, that first night in Cuba, when I awoke to see the moonlight, like a living presence in my room. Across the floor it lay in long, level bars of light. Not the iron barriers at my window could keep it out. Silver it was, and never still, but quivering as if a heart shook it. The scent of flowers came to me, and far off in what was probably the native quarter, I heard a throbbing instrument touched very softly, and the sound of singing. It was all so strange, I could scarcely believe myself awake. And presently, in nightgown and bare feet, I went across the cool tiles to the windows and looked out.

The earth was silver under my eyes and the tall palms delicately feathered with light. The singing died away to half a sob. The smell of growing things was heavy and sweet on the air. It was all sheer beauty.

A little song began to weave itself in my brain. I had made songs before: almost too shy to set down on paper they were. But here, in Cuba, where everything seemed softness and release, I wondered if perhaps I could not sing with a stronger voice, and shape my songs with pen and ink. What was it Richard Warren had said about poets? And then, suddenly I knew that it was the thought of him which had taken me out of sleep and sent me trembling to the window, with my breast bare to the wonderful night. I knew that, once and for all, all beauty must be inextricably woven with the thought of him who had signed himself my "lover."

It was then that I became aware that something was hurting me cruelly — something cold and hard and forbidding. I crept back to bed with the marks of the bars across my breast.

In the morning I woke to find Peter sitting crosslegged on my bed saying solemnly,

"They're blue! They're grey! No, they're open and they're brown!"

Wide awake now, I caught him to me, cuddled him close and then asked wildly,

"Oh-h, Peter! — what's that?"

Not far from my window a raucous voice was saying, "Bring me my coffee! Coffee! Norah! Hurry up!"

"Perhaps it's Uncle Bill!" said Peter, open-mouthed.

"Of course it isn't, Peter," I said quite crossly, and climbed out of bed.

From my window, in the full, dazzling sunlight, I could see where the kitchen made an L, and the screened kitchen porch from which that terrifying voice emanated.

"Hurry!" it was saying. "Gol dern! Coffee! Coffee!"

"Why, Peter," I cried, "it's a macaw! A beauty! I've never seen one before — only pictures! Hurry and get dressed and let's go out and say good-morning to him!"

Sarah, apparently at home, and certainly composed, but rather too communicative as to the habits of "heathen," appeared, to help me dress and to hustle Peter into his own room. But before I was ready, a knock came at the door, and on its heels, Norah, bearing fragrant coffee and hot, brown rolls.

"Good morning, and it's never *up* ye are!" she said

in astonishment, setting the tray down on a little table which she spread with a white cloth.

"Doesn't one get up in Cuba?" I asked, laughing, as, in a negligèe, I sat down to my breakfast.

"Not yet," she answered, "it's coffee ye have in bed, and then at eleven-thirty a rale, big breakfast-lunch. Tea's at four, and dinner's at eight — unless ye'd rather it was different, ma'am," she added hastily.

"Not at all," I assured her, "I think it's a delightful arrangement. When in Cuba . . ." I began gaily.

"Smoke Cubebs!" finished another voice, and my husband's dark head appeared in the open doorway. "Good morning, Mavis. How did you sleep?"

"Beautifully," I told him, just a little bit embarrassed as his tall, bathrobed figure wandered unconcernedly in.

"Another cup," he said to Norah, with a side-glance at me and a careless, "with your permission."

I nodded — I couldn't very well do anything else, with Sarah there, and Norah beaming, and Peter dashing in to shriek loudly for milk.

In the general tumult, the macaw had started again,

"Norah!" it squawked. "Coffee! Coffee!"

"For heaven's sake," I said, "what sophisticated sort of a bird is that?"

"That's Arthur," said Norah proudly, and disappeared. Later, I left Bill and Peter exchanging pleasantries over the breakfast table and went to the kitchen porch to watch Arthur being fed bread, lavishly sopped in coffee, from a spoon. He was an utterly gorgeous bird, yellow and blue, and "a great talker," as Norah informed me. Me, however, he regarded for some time with a glassy eye, and merely reiterated his desire for strong drink.

Returning, I found my room empty and closing

the door, proceeded, with mixed emotions, to dress.

Last night . . . the moonlight and the surge of regret and longing which had threatened to drown me, seemed very far away. And it was mentally on tip-toe that I joined a white flannelled Bill for my first stroll about my temporary domain.

We were alone, Peter having long since appropriated the services of Silas and gone forth with him to view the country.

The sun was very hot, and I tilted my parasol low over my face. Through avenues of palms we walked to the big, red-roofed garage, and on to the little orange grove behind the out-buildings. Beyond, the cane fields stretched, green and tall and waving. Figures, stunted, wiry, moved in the fields . . . far off I saw a patient donkey stand, his back loaded with long lengths of cane tips. It was all hot and still, clear-cut and unreal to look at.

Silas, Peter and one of the natives came toward us, Peter rapt at the tremendous flow of Cuban-Spanish which surged above his small blonde head. They stopped to speak to us, Bill growing suddenly foreign and gesticulating as he answered the bent brown man's greetings.

"That's Juan," he told me, as we moved off. "Great old character. He has a daughter whom he adores, a girl who must be sixteen now, I should judge. He used to beat her unmercifully. . . ."

"Horrible creature!" I said, with a shudder, my mind flashing back to that beautiful, sinister fortress rising, towered, from the sea, a symbol and a reminder. . . .

Bill pushed his panama back from his broad forehead and whistled.

"I don't know," he said thoughtfully. . . . "After all, he beat her to keep her good."

A peacock, tail unfurled, minced colorfully toward us, down the white pathway.

"To keep her good!" I repeated scornfully, "with whipping?"

"I'm not advocating it," he answered quickly, "but his motives are unquestionably admirable. And there's a Spanish proverb, you may recall — it runs, tersely, 'A woman, a dog, and a chestnut-tree, the more you beat them, the better they be!'"

Wiggles, his eyes on the stately departing peacock, pranced down the path toward us, and, deflected by my whistle from his original, doubtless destructive purpose, leaped gaily at my ruffles.

"Did you hear that, Wiggles?" I asked him. "This is decidedly no place for you!"

But Wiggles, rolling happily in the grass, merely snorted.

A gong sounded from the house, and we went in to lunch.

About two o'clock, I was attacked by an overpowering languor. Twice, no less, I yawned in Peter's face, in the midst of his thrilling description of "babies an' ladies an' gentlemen, all brown, Aunt Mavis!"

"Siesta, now!" remarked my husband briskly. "Both of you! Off to bed!"

"Bed!" I said, "in the middle of the day!"

Peter, but recently released from the burden of an afternoon nap, protested.

"Custom of the country," said Bill. "No getting around it. Couldn't if you wanted to. Even Arthur is asleep."

I listened. We were on the verandah, and all about us was a stillness which was almost audible. On the white road beyond our gates I saw a pair of oxen, toiling patiently up the hill. Even the birds were quiet, only now and then a sleepy chirping drifted down the hot air. It seemed as if a veil had been drawn over the land. My eyelids felt freighted, and I was very tired.

"Bed!" said Bill firmly.

I left Peter to his tender mercies and went indoors. My room was cool, and sweet with flower perfume. Sarah, yawning, came when I rang, and unhooked my frock. As I lay down on the bed, I heard her say something, bitterly, about "an unhealthy climate," but if she said more, I do not know what it was, for I was fast and dreamlessly asleep.

It was Arthur who woke me, making the day hideous with his laughter. "Mother's darling!" he announced, unctuously. "Pretty Arthur! Arthur! Arthur!"

I turned over and felt for my watch. Four o'clock! It was incredible. And equally beyond belief, the fact that I was hungry again!

I bathed and dressed, and then, wonderfully rested, went out on the verandah. Fong and Wing appeared as if by magic and laid the tea-table with iced tea, tiny round tomato sandwiches, and delectable frosted cakes. And also, as if answering some compelling summons, Peter, bright-eyed and red-cheeked, strolled out from the direction of Bill's room. It was quite apparent that both of them had been asleep.

"Tea?" I asked my husband, as his tall figure loomed up behind Peter.

"Certainly!" he said. "It's a necessity in Cuba, not a mere excuse for sociability."

All about us the birds were singing again, and the palms looked new washed.

"It looks as if it had rained," I said in amazement.

"Probably has," said Bill lazily, "Often does afternoons."

What a country!

That night, I made my first little song. There was a thought somewhere, back in my brain, a thought of moonlight and bars and a far-off singing. But it was not clear yet. So, instead, I set to paper the first eight lines that Cuba had made for me.

Fantasie

The palms are listening to Pan
  Across the Terrace of the Night,
  A Peacock-Moon, aloof and white,
Spreads wide a silver fan.

The gilded stars with laughter pass,
  For I have caught an eerie sound,
  The Peacock droops . . . just now, I found
A silver feather in the grass!

And so the days passed in blur of color and scent: of sun and sleep.

Peter grew tanned, and so did I. It was life in a fairy tale, and would have seemed quite perfect — if —. But I had grown to believe that nothing was ever perfect. Perhaps it were wise so, else we should all be loath even more to leave life. And the rift in the lute could not wholly ruin the music.

We had been there a week, I imagine, before Mercedes Howell descended upon us. She came apparelled marvel-

lously, in a highly horse-powered chariot, and brought with her, as was eminently proper, her parents.

Mrs. Howell, née Dolores Maria Cortez, was that pathetic thing, a woman who had once been very beautiful. It was not hard to trace that beauty now, in the high, clean-cut nose, the great languid eyes, the tiny, full, red mouth. But her beauty was clouded with flesh, and her face a mask of powder. She sat on the verandah drinking "pina fria," with her tiny, arched feet on a footstool, and murmured polite accented thanks for the care we had taken of her dear child. I glanced at Bill, over a tray of cakes, but he was looking at Mercedes. So I turned, with a quickened heartbeat, to Mr. Howell. I found him charming, a tall, silent man, brown from the sun, and very lined. He listened eagerly, I fancied, to my chatter of home and snow and the quiet ebb and flow of life in a New England village. But Cuba had marked him for her own. One saw that. And one saw, too, his restless eyes moving from wife to daughter, questioning and troubled.

Mrs. Howell, before she left, asked us to some day attend the races with her. I told her I was not well, not yet up to the excitement of crowds. . . . But Bill, looking up quickly from his low-voiced conversation with Mercedes, said,

"Perhaps I can persuade Mrs. Denton, dear lady. It is something she surely should not miss."

Our glances met — crossed blades and stayed. Mine was hurt, I know. It was cruel of him, in that insufferably self-assured tone, to brush aside my wishes. When our guests had gone, I told him so.

"But," he said, at the doorway, "what you need more than anything, is contact with people, and to be taken out

of yourself. You have never seen anything of the sort before, and you will not have the opportunity again. And the Howells are very good people to tie up to. They have lived here many years and have not wholly discarded the picturesque viewpoints and customs of the country, while at the same time, entering into the life of the American set."

"I didn't come here for society," I said, "and I don't want to be bothered. . . by anyone. Go alone to the races, if you will, but I shall not."

He shrugged.

"Very well," he said.

Two days later, Bill drove the car into Havana, where he joined the Howells in a luncheon party and went afterwards to the races with them. I wondered if they would not think it very strange...under the circumstances. And then I reflected that an extra man, married or bachelor, is welcome almost anywhere. And during my brief betrothal Bill had declared himself "quite free."

I didn't care, of course, where he went or with whom. It was none of my business. And it was the loneliness and the longing for things that could never be mine, which oppressed me and made me spend my sleepless afternoon siesta on a tear-damp pillow.

When Bill came home that night, I harkened politely to his account of his outing, and then went early to my room. The poem which had made itself mine during my first night in Cuba was clamoring to be written. And so I wrote it, at my table under the window, conscious that no words in so unskilled a hand could set down my feeling of imprisonment and regret.

Finished, I laid it in the drawer where my diary and the letters from Richard Warren were. It was a childish

thing, but I had made it, and it belonged to me . . . and to one other.

Nocturne

The moonlight slips in silence through the bars,
The iron bars which lend a strange romance
To my wide windows, open to the stars,
Which, like gold fire-flies, imprisoned, dance
Caught in the dark mantilla of the Night;
That flowing veil of jewelled, enchanting lace
From careless, faery finger-tips flung light
To veil the tropic Moon's pale, ardent face.

My windows give on gardens dim, a-gleam
And freshly fragrant with night-growing things,
On gardens where the sleeping flowers dream
Till, cradled on the errant wind's cool wings
Their little souls are wafted to far lands,
While all their dreams like incense, float and rise
To where some garden goddess with white hands,
Gems with bright dew her nurslings' sleep-kissed eyes.

In shadowed groves, with brilliant moon, blood-stained,
A bird is sobbing for a distant star,
In golden longing for the Unattained . . .
While at some window, pleading, a guitar
Touched by brown fingers, throbs in serenade.
And still the moonbeams fling a silvern dart,
Straight through my window's iron barricade . . .
Thus Love steals, silent, to the prisoned heart,
And, smiling, with a mockery divine
Slips softly to some unguessed, secret shrine,
To set the Altar Fires flaming high!

. . . . . .

I closed the drawer — spent, unsatisfied. The thing

was halting and superficial. It did not seem possible that there were people who could find release in words, or peace in beauty.

I had not reread Richard Warren's letters since my marriage. And this was a night I dared not read them, for all that my resolve weakened. For, in some inexplicable way, he had become very real to me — in Cuba. And I knew that he could not be anyone save himself, could not be anything save strong and fine and understanding.

I took my trouble into Peter's room and sat with it for a long time, by his bedside. But it was Dawn, before, in my cool, deep alcove, I had ceased tossing and slept.

CHAPTER XI

A week slipped by before we returned the Howells' call. Then, one brilliant morning, I drove with Bill into Havana and together we transacted some embarrassing monetary business at the bank. After which I expressed a desire to go shopping. The sidewalks were quite impassable: so narrow that, for the most part, the pedestrians, unhurried, strolled in the hardly wider streets. The shops held me, fascinated. And I was not a little annoyed at the manner in which Bill conducted my purchases — here a gorgeous feather fan, there a piece of lace: and in another spot a deadly and lovely bit of Toledo workmanship, executed with rare finesse on the hilt of a stiletto. Yet, I too, was determined not to return to Green Hill without a trunk laden with gifts for my dear people there. Once, I slipped away from my husband, who was deep in conversation . . . of a political nature, judging from the volubility of the shop-keeper who engaged his attention . . . and, entering a store some five or six houses away, I tried out my absurd and garbled knowledge of Spanish, with terrifying results. For the little lady who guarded the delicate linens flooded me with such an impressive flow of wholly unintelligible syllables, that, baffled, I beat an ignominious retreat, followed by her to the very door. On the street I met Bill, hatless and disturbed out of all proportion.

"Please never do that again, Mavis," he commanded,

taking my arm. "I am not willing to have you roam the streets of Havana alone."

I drew my arm away.

"I am quite capable of taking care of myself," I said with frigidity, "especially in broad daylight."

"This is not Green Hill," he answered enigmatically, "nor yet New York."

I started to reply, but a glance from a passing dark-eyed individual, immaculately attired in white, quelled me. I had never before encountered anything quite so sweeping, so totally inventorying, so insolent. I had the immediate sensation that I was in one of those nightmare dreams, in which one walks upon a public highway, quite unclothed. Unconsciously, I cast a reassuring glance at my lavender linen, and breathed again. I must have gasped, for Bill looked from my blazing cheeks to the wayfaring gentleman. Something belligerent came into his eyes, and then he looked into mine, lifting his brows.

"You see?" he remarked.

It was plain that I had seen. I said nothing, but hastened my steps.

"Where did you leave your hat?" I asked sweetly.

We retrieved the object and went to where we had left the car, driving to a restaurant, high over the harbor, where, on the second floor, we lunched deliciously, on palatable creatures sinisterly named Morro crabs, and other delicacies. A gun boat lay, far off, at rest on the blue waters, and here and there the black funnels of steamers lifted darkly against a burning sky. People at neighboring tables bowed to my companion. Several came over to us and were presented to me: a ruddy-faced Englishman, of military bearing, and with an ineffable air of detachment from his surroundings: a member of the

American Legation, a lean, bearded man, with an unamerican name and a dark face, reminding me of an ancient Spanish nobleman whose picture I had once seen: a fair-haired, attractive boy, and others whom I have forgotten. And the meal could hardly have been termed a tête-à-tête. I was heartily glad of it.

Until the calling hour came, we amused ourselves with a survey of the crowded districts of the city. An appalling number of tourists passed and repassed us, obviously bent on the same idle occupation. Pretty girls in bright sweaters and tennis-shoes: fat mothers, similarly clad: and patient, bored men, silent or loquacious, chewing black Cuban cigars, following their women folk in and out the shops. And on the broader thoroughfares, I saw the Cuban women driving in open victorias, powdered and wonderfully dressed, regarding the "touristen" with slightly cynical, always beautiful, eyes.

The Howells' great house, a stone structure on the Vadado, was a revelation of formal and chilling luxury. As we waited for Mrs. Howell to come to us in the drawing-room, Bill murmured under his breath,

"'I dreamt I dwelt in marble halls!' Isn't it amazing?"

Before I could answer, our hostess swept in, accompanied, almost preceded, by an overpowering wave of perfume. I had no time to reply, but found myself nodding at him in sympathetic appreciation. All through the somewhat stilted conversation which followed, the stately tea, and the meteoric appearance of Mercedes, as chatty and brilliant as some tropical bird, I seemed to cling to the solidity and confident familiarity of my husband as the one real thing in an unreal room.

But, leaving, I was forced to confess to myself the

real friendliness and cordiality of these alien people towards me, a stranger at their imposing gates.

It was Mercedes who explained to me that the feminine quality of Havana did not go a-shopping in sport clothes.

"You would not do it," she said, "on your Fifth Avenue. We do not do it here. It is not the custom. We wear our smartest gowns and our highest-heeled shoes."

She made an entrancing little moue at the thought of sweaters and rubber soles. And, with a feeling of commiseration toward my comfortably sport-clad compatriots, dashing through Havana streets, lavish of exclamation and of purse I was foolishly glad that something had prompted me to look my coolest and prettiest before setting forth on the expedition.

I remember that day well, for it was on the same evening, back once more in the palm-enclosed gardens of my new home, that Juan, the native workman appeared, shortly after dinner, a broad-brimmed hat clutched to his sunken chest, his face working oddly, demanding to speak to the doctor.

I heard scattered words—"fiebre" and "agonia," and the name "Annunciata" repeated again and again. And, finally, when Bill rose with a quiet, brief sentence, I caught a long-drawn "ah-h" and "Dios! muchisimas gracias, Senor!" from the old man.

"Juan's daughter is ill," Bill told me quickly. "I'm going with him. Shan't be long. Go to bed, Mavis, you look done up. It's been a long day."

Stopping only to get his hat and an emergency case, he was gone with the excited, anxious old man, and I was alone in the big room.

Something he had said to me, far back in what now seemed the past ages, came to me vaguely, something about the "poetry of healing." And I pondered upon it for a long time, till a falling log roused me, and I went to bed. But not until I heard a familiar step on the path did I consider sleeping. I slipped on a negligée and went to my door. He was coming toward me, tired, I thought, and troubled.

"Bill!" I called softly.

He stopped a moment, peering into the dim light which streamed through the half-open door into the narrow, long hall which separated our rooms.

"Mavis!" and then, reproachfully. "Why aren't you in bed?"

"You've been gone hours," I said, conscious of a childish petulance. "How is she?"

With a hand on the latch of his own door, he considered me. I must have looked a sight, half-asleep, my hair in braids down my thinly-clad back. But if he thought so, he did not say it.

"All right now," he answered. "But she was a pretty sick girl. And, of course, they had applied home-made remedies, liberally sprinkled with superstition! It looked like a case of ptomaine to me. Anyway, she'll be on the road to recovery — and more beatings — tomorrow. It was," he concluded with a smile, "a rather disconcerting evening. Half a dozen people praying all over the place, and, when I left, kissing my hands! Lucky I've had some experience in dealing with the natives before this."

"I'm glad," I said. "Poor old Juan!"

"It was nice of you to wait up," said Bill suddenly. "Thanks!"

I became acutely conscious of the hour and of my appearance.

"I — I was interested," I said lamely.

"Yes, that's it," he answered, a smile lighting up his worn face, "it's not often that you — honor me."

It was on the tip of my tongue to reply, "my interest is solely in old Juan and his daughter." But I didn't. It didn't seem quite fair, and wasn't strictly true.

"Good-night," I said, withdrawing, "I'm glad she's all right."

From his closing door his words floated back to me,

"Buenas noches, cara mia!"

Annunciata recovered, and to Sarah's outspoken disapproval I had her come often to the house. She sewed excellently, and embroidered even better, and I was glad to be able to give her small odds and ends of work to do. She was a lovely thing: rounded, and supple, with a clear, creamy-brown skin. But chancing one day to observe her mother on the road below the house I was smitten with a prophetic horror for Annunciata's future. For the woman, who could not have been more than thirty-five was as bent and gnarled as a Northerner of sixty, wrinkled like a monkey and with something of that creature's patient, if malicious wisdom in her eyes. I began to realize that Juan, too was according to our standards a man still in his early prime. I was confused by such an ordering of Nature. I said something of this to Bill but he only answered, knocking the ashes from his pipe.

"Southern fruit ripens quickly."

"It doesn't seem fair," I said, rebelliously, thinking of Annunciata and her slow, indolent grace. At sixteen I — but perhaps I was not a good example.

"Our girls are children at sixteen," I told him.

"You are a child at — what is it — twenty-two," he answered.

I did not pursue the personal application further. But it was not right that this young thing should be a woman so soon, and so shortly destined to be old. Youth — and Age. There are no timid blossomings, no gracious gradations in the South.

We were, very quietly, rather gay those days. I had been several times to luncheon at the Country Club and had met a number of delightful Americans there. It was all very new and exciting. And so invariably beautiful! And I was absurdly glad that Bill ranked very high in the estimation of the other men, as a golfer. Watching remnants of the game from the long, wide Club-porch, I was astounded by the seriousness with which grown men pursued an inocuous white ball for miles and miles of green turf. Once, in the late afternoon, together with a party of several women including Mercedes Howell, I followed a match game for a time. The exotic view, the stunted palms, the small lizards that ran almost from under our feet, animate emeralds, the glimpse of blue water from a hill, enthralled me. But I think that the small, black or tan boys who carried the clubs and who bet their prospective fees with whole-hearted enthusiasm on the respective merits of their employers amused me more than anything I had ever seen. And it was of course solely from sympathy with my husband's ebony attendant that I knew a certain triumph, when, long after we women had tired and returned to the club-house, the men came in, hot and shrieking for cool drinks, proclaiming Bill as victor. He had "saved the game by supernatural putting" his partner, the fair haired boy I had met in the Havana restaurant, announced enviously.

"You should be proud of him," he added, sitting down beside me.

"I am," I said dutifully.

Bill, en route to a mysterious thing called a locker, paused to cast a mirthful look at me, and quite against my will I laughed. I am certain that the blond one, who answered to the name of Bobby Willard, thought me demented.

A number of people called upon us almost every day, motoring out for luncheon or tea. Our little household ran smoothly, and happily. Sarah and Nora gradually became excellent friends, and, evenings, I would often hear Silas's low voice in the kitchen, and going in to consult Nora, would surprise his lean form, sprawled in a kitchen chair, two legs of it off the floor, smoking his inevitable cigar, a coffee-cup at his elbow. To Wing and Fong, Sarah, to my astonishment, perceptibly unbent. It was apparent that the two silent little Asiatics regarded her with admiration and awe. Bill suggested that she was doubtless trying to convert them. But I could not believe that!

Peter was perhaps, the most whole-heartedly happy of any of us. Never very far from Silas's side, he assumed a lordly dictatorship over the natives, and picked up an amazing amount of Spanish, in his excursions about the plantation. Silas taught him to ride, too, on a lean little Cuban horse, and would ride out with him, in the early mornings, tremendously amused at the grave manner in which Peter would return the white-toothed salutations of the passersby. In those days, also, I elected to oversee Peter's neglected education, and, with more ambition than efficiency, would devote the half hour before his supper time to teaching him to read. Bill, with his pipe and his

newspaper, would attend these sessions, from a far corner of the room. And I could not refrain from reflecting how, to an unenlightened observer, very domestic we would appear. That the thought had not escaped Bill, too, was apparent by a remark he made one evening. Coming to the mantel-piece, he looked at the two of us for some time, and said,

"You make a charming picture, you two children. Exemplary," he added with a smile.

I made no comment, but bent lower over the page on which the pregnant legend, "This is a cat," appeared in large letters, flanking an appropriate illustration.

Those were days, even, and uneventful in the larger sense. There were varying episodes, incidents, which however did not break into the continuity of a life that seemed a half-waking dream. Once, I went fishing with Bill and Bobby Willard. It was pleasant, drifting over the peacock-blue waters, and of our not inconsiderable catch nothing remains in my memory save the almost unnatural beauty of certain gorgeous fish, colored red and blue and purple, with little sail-like fins.

I had my first swimming lesson in many years, at that time too. And the picture of the beach, the feel of the velvet-soft, brilliantly blue water, the laughing people and the many children, stayed with me for a long time. At my second dip, I actually swam three strokes, not, however, without Bill's solidly protective arm. He swam magnificently himself. Mercedes Howells, transformed into a most seductive mermaid by a bright green bathing suit, was most outspoken in her admiration.

"What a wonderful figure," she said, in a wholly audible aside to me.

I was forced to agree, but swallowed a good deal more water than was comfortable in the process.

Bill, in spite of his vigorous exploits in the water, seemed content to spend most of his swimming hour with Peter and me. But after he had sent us to the bathing pavilion to dress, he swam far out to join Mercedes, and when I came from my cubicle again, they were just coming out of the water together, a splendidly matched pair, laughing, vital. A curious languor came over me as I watched them walking across the beach.

"You're tired," said Bill, dripping before me.

"A little," I admitted.

So after that, I swam rarely. The ride in from Guayabal was long and tiring. And once or twice a week, I stayed at home, while Bill went forth in the motor, to golf and swim, coming back in time for dinner.

I was never bored. There were letters from Father to answer: a difficult diplomatic task; letters too, from the Goodriches, who were dashing about the Continent at a breath-taking speed. Peter had half an album filled with postcards before his parents had been on the other side two weeks! And of course I had to take innumerable snapshots with the little kodak Bill bought me in Havana, in order to pictorially report Peter's progress. Uncle John wrote often, sometimes to Bill, sometimes to me, and now and then to us both jointly. The advent of the mail was a real joy. No one seemed to forget us, everyone demanded an immediate reply. And it was difficult not to put off letter writing until the morrow. For I had not been in Cuba more than twenty-eight hours before the "manana philosophy" had laid hold of me.

In my secret drawer a little pile of poems grew. I was amazed at the way the songs came to me, sang in my brain

and would not be still until I had put them on paper. In my heart, I harbor a timid ambition of one day showing them to Uncle John. If he would publish them, privately, I could send a copy to Richard Warren. After all — they were his: his and Cuba's and mine own.

Between tea and dinner, the days when Bill was not at home, I would walk. Sometimes with little Peter, or with Annunciata, sometimes alone, save for little Wiggles. Little by little I grew to know the natives by name and station: went, even into their one-roomed houses, dark and smoky, thatched with palm leaves, and odorous with charcoal stoves. One amusing acquaintance I made was that of old Manuel, who lived not for from our gates. Annunciata took me there, affirming that of all the Guayablan sights, this was one I must not miss. Bill was horrified to hear of my call at Manuel's pitifully poor dwelling. But he went there himself later, to see if in any way, he could alleviate the very obvious poverty and probable suffering of the ancient creature. For the tradition had it that Manuel was one hundred and twenty years old. Certain it was that he remembered Havana when it was little more than a cow-pasture. Age had shrunken him to the stature of a child, but his eye were still bright, his features cleancut, his grey hair and beard still curling and vigorous. The village people took a certain pride in their ancient, and he did not lack for visitors. Propped up on a make-shift bed, wrapped in rags, from which his bare thin legs protruded, he received me with great dignity. And we talked for fully half an hour: that is to say, Annunciata talked, and Manuel talked, and now and then the former would translate a phrase or two into her scanty English. It

was from Bill, however, that I heard most of the old man's story.

It was on one of my solitary excursions that the sudden night surprised me, a quarter of a mile from home. The smoke-blue rim of mountains grew black and menacing, and the song of the light winds in the palms turned to a sinister whispering. With Wiggles at my hurrying heels, I fairly fled through the night, ashamed of my unreasoning terror. A group of Rurales, the native soldiers, passed me with a clatter of hoofs. Later, a bare-footed native, riding saddleless, singing in a curious, eerie monotone, to ward off the evil spirits, rode slowly by. There was a heavy perfume in the air, and a young moon swung delicately into view. But I had no heart for beauty, and almost stumbling into the hedge of Spanish Bayonets which fringed our property, I came through the open gates into the light from the house, with a half-sob of relief, and an exceedingly youthful fear of justifiable chastisement. But it was some ten minutes after I had come home, that I heard the car, with Bill at the wheel, swing up to the portico. That evening, discussing the past day, I refrained from mentioning my little adventure. For it was an adventure, mysterious, strange, and somehow terrifying.

The evenings were pleasant. We read a great deal, aloud, and I was surprised to find my husband no mean critic, widely read, and with keen appreciation. We sat, always before the fire, and much of the time I would forget to listen to the sense of the words, hearing only the sound of the attractive, flexible voice, and watching the flames on the big hearth. I never wearied of that. There was a wonderful poem in the logs, flowering blue

and rose, gold and scarlet: charring to white and red, which seemed like some extraordinary fungus-growth: singing and flickering, intensely alive in disintegration.

And so the days drew into March, and still we lingered. Bill, persuaded by neighbors that even May was bearable in Cuba, spoke of staying at least until the middle of April. I did not care. Father was still in Canada, and Green Hill would have been empty without him. It was a Lotus-eater's life and I was content. The sight of the great, purple orchids, fragile and almost unbelievably beautiful, clinging to the palm-trees, was enough to keep me happy for a whole day. To look from the windows through the luxuriance of the bourginvilla vines to the golden-freighted orange-trees was a rare delight. To see the cane-fields in the wind, the hibiscus under a noon sun, the peacocks pacing the white walks before sunset, was to live a poem. If, now and then, on still nights, a restlessness and nostalgia for something keener, sharper, something unnamable and unknown, would seize me, it would vanish again before the breathless, expectant dawn. And, if one grew melancholy, there was always Arthur to turn to — a bird, philosophic and unexpected, who had developed a feud with Wiggles. To watch the two of them, Arthur resplendent and mocking on his perch, Wiggles, a black lump of outrage dashing up and down before the door of the wire cage, which was as big as a small room, was a sight to dispel dull care. And from someone, Arthur had learned endearing names. "Pretty darling!" he would articulate, his head flirtatiously to one side, his beady eyes fixed on mine, his claw extended with quite the grand manner. And, when, nettled by his tone, I would advance to the cage, he would slide off to the other end of

his perch and demand bleakly, "Coffee! Gol dern! Bow wow wow!" a climax that never failed to arouse Wiggles to frenzy.

And so, between beauty and laughter, firelight and sunshine, we trod, all unknowing, perilously close to tragedy.

CHAPTER XII

Cactus

Twisted, deformed, and stretching thorny hands
To mock the golden beauty of the South,
Embodied Evil, set in glowing lands
Like some black curse within a lovely mouth,
The sullen cactus, lone and brooding, stands.
Yet Earth, All-Just, All-Wise, All-Tender, deems
Her crippled offspring worthy still to bear
The crown of perfect blossoms: as beseems,
Some dark misshapen souls, in secret wear
The splendid Flower of their silent Dreams!

It was, of course, the tall cactus, to the left of the house, which set me to singing. For a long time it had affronted me. Pallid, sickly, abnormal, flowering suddenly into crimson blossom, it was for me, an actual blot on the lovely landscape gardening of the Palms. But one day I said something of this to Bill, and he said,

"It may start out in ugliness, but it's rooted in strength and ends in beauty, doesn't it?"

This gave me "furiously to think." In an early letter to me, Richard Warren had said something very much the same, not, however, apropos of cactus plants. And here was my matter-of-fact, mocking husband preaching the same doctrine of "beauty everywhere." After that, I tried to make friends with the uncouth cactus, and, as so often happens, grew quite attached to it. Nights, it stood like a sentinel ghost, its deformities softened, and its

flowers courageous and gay in the moonlight. My growing sense of comradeship with Bill was materially increased at that half-minute remark of his. We were really quite friendly, by that time, playing together like two children, not much older than Peterkins, and the rather ironic attitude toward me which I had so resented, seemed to lessen, or at least to be less noticeable.

If it hadn't been for Peter — or, if it hadn't been for me — and if Bill hadn't said —

Anyway, our even, sunny life and relationship came to an abrupt end.

On a day when Bill elected to golf with Mr. Howells — Mercedes had developed wonderfully as a gallery of one! — I chose to stay at home and attend to a number of small neglected duties. The day before we had spent near Mariano, with one of the secretaries at the American Legation and his wife. We had had a delightful day, in a most fascinating house, all cool, wide patios, and flat roofs, over which the palms waved. It seemed to me as if I were not in Cuba or even Spain, but somewhere in the Far East. At tea-time, the wife of the Chinese Minister called, a tiny lady, exquisite and low-voiced, looking far too young to be the mother of seven sturdy children, as she proudly assured me she was. To hear her talk of "my boy in Yale" seemed positively absurd. It was, as I have said, a delightful day, but tiring, and I was content to stay at home when the next day dawned, very hot and still.

Peter rode in the morning and chased, hatless, about the grounds in the afternoon. He had made many friends among the *muchachos*. I saw him at luncheon and then, not until after tea. Something, perhaps the very oppressive atmosphere, made me restless and out of

sorts. I started about half-past four, to walk aimlessly toward the gates and encountering Peter and Wiggles invited them to accompany me. Afterwards, it occurred to me that Peter seemed very quiet. He walked along beside me, his hands in the pockets of his sailor-suit, with none of his usual flow of general misinformation. But I was preoccupied more so than I had been in weeks. Father had been in my thoughts all day, and back in my brain there were other thoughts — vague and unformed, but curiously disturbing. I was beset with a desire, a longing for something — I knew not what. It was, perhaps, a species of Spring-fever, of wanderlust, which seized upon me and set me to walking now over-fast, now languidly.

We had gone perhaps a half a mile when a strange little sound escaped from Peter's lips. For the first time I looked at his little mouth, a white line stood out against the dark red color.

"It's the heat," I said to myself, and asked him anxiously,

"Do you feel very warm, Peterkins?"

His answer was almost inaudible, and he drooped wearily against my side, as we stood there in the white road, with the distant fringe of mountains almost dancing under quivering waves of heat.

Wiggles, panting, looked at us anxiously, his scrap of a tongue between his crooked teeth.

"We'll go right home," said I, feigning an unconcern I did not feel.

I took his hand and was terrified at the burning touch of it, realizing that the child was ill, perhaps seriously so, and that we were half a mile from home.

Something like despair came over me. It was out of

the question that I could carry Peter — he was a tall boy for his age and very heavy. It only remained to put my arm about him and to coax him along, a slow and painful task.

We had covered the first half of the distance when I heard a car behind us, and turned hopefully to hail it. And when the long green body shot clearly into sight, I was suddenly faint with relief. Bill, coming back early from the club! Bill, at the wheel, his hat off, and the wind blowing his dark hair.

The car stopped.

"Mavis! It's too hot for you and Peter to be out. I didn't play — what's the matter?"

I lifted Peter in my arms.

"It's Peter, Bill," I said. "He's — ill."

In two minutes I was in the back seat with the half-delirious boy in my arms, and Bill was urging the car to her utmost speed, and we were suddenly home.

Between them, Bill and Sarah got Peter into bed. I was too frightened to be of any use. I kept thinking of the little Reynolds boy who had died of fever in that very house . . . and of Peter's mother. But I didn't dare think of her long, because I could see her eyes so plainly as they looked when she said,

"You'll take good care of Peter for me, won't you, Mavis?"

Good care of Peter! For a week I had hardly thought of him. I kissed him mornings and nights, gave him his lessons, listened to his chatter, not really heeding. And I had been away so much, drunken with my new freedom, my strength, blooming like a plant in the climate that tried so many other people sorely: utterly wrapped up in my own sensations and impressions.

I went softly into the room Peter shared with Sarah. It was a different boy tossing on the bed, with that curious flush, the groping hands, talking incessantly, incoherently.

Bill, bending over him, looked up as I came in. His face was strange to me too. No, not quite. I had seen that intense, almost grim, look on that face once before — as I came out of a dark hour of agony and looked, for the first time, into two steel-blue eyes.

"Oh, what is it?" I asked very low. "Is he dangerously ill?"

"A touch of sun," he answered. "Yes, He's pretty sick."

There was nothing I could do. All that night I went in and out of the room, glad if they would let me bring them little things: water, a glass, a spoon.

It made matters worse to find Nora praying loudly in the kitchen, and Silas, his lean face all broken up into soft lines of anxiety and sorrow, watching up with her.

The news spread, in some indeterminable fashion. During the night, a number of the men on the plantation came to the door to ask for news. Peter had endeared himself to half Guayabal —

About three o'clock in the morning, worn out, I went into the bathroom for something for Bill. As I did not reappear with it he came to look for me presently, and found me, huddled against the wall, my hands at my throat, an abject picture of cowardice and fright.

I was not alone in the room. A few yards away from me, on the tiled floor, a spider was sprawling, regarding we with almost human, terribly malicious eyes. The creature was as large as a tea-cup, black, horribly spotted with red, it's many legs twitching with vicious life.

"Are you ill?" Bill asked as I pointed with a shaking

hand to the spider, which at the sound of another step had taken itself quickly to another corner of the room.

My husband put his arm about me, and conducted me safely to my own room,

"You poor child!" was all he said, and closed the door into the bathroom. A few minutes later I heard him occupied in there, with what seemed, or sounded, like a golf-club. There was a scuffle. Once I heard Bill curse, and then finally silence.

Presently, my door opened and Bill came in.

"I've disposed of your visitor," he said, quite cheerfully. "Nasty mess. And Peter is better. He'll be all right, I'm sure, only we shall have to be very careful of him after this. And now, I want you to go to bed or I shall have another patient on my hands."

I went to bed; but not until the rain came, about five, and Peter's room became quiet, did I fall into a troubled sleep.

It was past noon before I woke. Sarah looking very tired came in with some coffee and the assurance that Peter was out of all danger and was sleeping quietly with the fever broken.

"Oh, Sarah," I said, "you haven't had any sleep."

"Dr. Denton sent me to bed at five," she answered, "but he never took his own clothes off until about eight. I slept in the guest room, the other side of Peter's, and when I woke, about seven, again, I got some coffee for him from Norah. And he left me with Peter then, and went into his own room."

"Is he asleep now?" I asked getting out of bed.

"No, for I heard the water running in his bath, half an hour ago."

While I was dressing I heard Bill in Peter's room.

Heard too, with what gratitude, Peter's own normal voice, weak but sane again.

I slipped on a frock hastily and went in to them. Of the two, I thought that Bill looked the worst, very white and drawn.

After luncheon when Wing had disappeared in the pantry, Bill told me that Peter had had a very close call.

"I don't like to blame anyone, of course," he said, with knitted brows, "but if Sarah didn't have sense enough — well, Silas has lived in Cuba long enough to have known that the heat yesterday was sufficient to knock out a strong man, much less a little boy, if he became overtired."

"I'm afraid it was my fault," I answered, slowly, "Peter was riding all morning and romping all afternoon. And then I took him for a walk —"

"Did you know then that he had been playing hard all day?" Bill asked me.

"Why, yes," I said honestly, "but I was thinking about something else, and —"

Bill's hand went out in an impatient gesture.

"Didn't *you* feel the heat?" he asked.

"I suppose so," I answered, "but I had been in the house all day —"

"And Peter hadn't!" he finished for me, somewhat irrelevantly, I thought.

I was silent.

"It's incredible," said my husband, with extreme irritation, "that you shouldn't have noticed."

"But —" I began, and stopped. It was true. I hadn't noticed; and it was equally true that the fact was incredible.

Conscious of my guilt, I was still able to be resentful of my husband's tone.

"Do you think for a minute —" I began indignantly, with no clear idea of how I was going to finish: so perhaps it was just as well that I was interrupted.

"I don't think anything at all," he said, "but I *know* that I shouldn't have gone away. Had I known the day was going to turn out such a scorcher, I would have stayed.

His tone implied that what he should have known was that I was not fit to be trusted alone. I didn't like the implication, and I said so.

After which, at the end of ten minutes, I had positively flounced from the room, after the manner of our grandmothers, and left him sitting there.

I didn't see him again until dinner. It was not a particularly joyful meal.

During the rather silent progress of dinner, I had the grace to be rather ashamed of some of the things I had said. In the cooler light of reason, I looked on a number of the statements I had made and found them unconvincing.

Our sporadic conversation was of trivial things. Not until Wing had departed kitchenward, and Bill lighted his after-luncheon cigarette, was our late unpleasantness alluded to.

"Mavis," said my husband, with a hint of the old, ironic smile I had not seen in many weeks, and which immediately alienated me from him, "I'm afraid that we were both a little tired and over-wrought this morning. And for anything I said which may have offended you, I am quite ready to ask your pardon. However, it is, perhaps, just as well that I understand the way you feel

about me. I am, admittedly then, a 'brute': and I have 'presumed' to criticize you, unfairly and without cause — or so you have said. Let that pass. The most important thing is that you are becoming bored with this solitary confinement, and it so happens that it is within my power to offer you more congenial companionship. I had a letter this morning from Wright Penny — you recall him, do you not? He is in Santiago, and proposes to come to Havana and run out to see us. If it is agreeable to you, I shall wire him to come on prepared to stay, and to return North with us when we go. Would you like that?"

Seven times seven little devils entered into me then, and I clasped my hands on the table and made my eyes round with pleasure.

"I would be delighted," I said, sincerely enough. "I liked Mr. Penny — what little I saw of him. And I am sure that he would be a congenial house-guest."

"Our first," remarked Bill, with a wholly wicked grin. And I felt as if we had slipped back several months, to a time when enmity was the only possible thing between us, and our weeks of pleasant comradeship were the shadow of a dream.

There must be, I thought, a very real antagonism for one another in our natures: for otherwise, so deep and unspoken a breach could not have been made in ten minutes of foolish anger.

"Wright says," Bill continued, "that he hesitates to intrude upon our 'happy honeymoon hours.' A pretty alliteration. It is not necessary, I hope, to inform him of his mistake."

"He may have eyes —" I suggested.

"Being a poet," he objected, "he is probably myopic."

I ignored this.

"I must find him some pretty girls to pay with," I said idly.

"Mercedes," said Bill, "might fit the case."

I was conscious of a sudden flare of anger.

"Bobby Willard's little sister," I said, "seems more Mr. Penny's type. She is very gentle and lovely."

"Meow?" said my husband, with a rising inflection.

The bright color came to my cheeks.

"Not at all," I said indignantly. "I like Mercedes Howell very much. But—"

Bill raised an eyebrow, smiled at the glowing end of the cigarette in his hand and said nothing.

He got up from the table and went toward the door.

"Have Miss Willard out here by all means," he said, "but she's milk and water. For my own amusement, in my own humble opinion, Mercedes is more stimulating to the Tired Business Man."

He stopped to light another cigarette.

"Of course," he said, through the first breath of smoke, "Wright will naturally suspect you of match-making. All young, happily married women have that benign tendency."

I was stricken dumb with sudden hatred, and before my lips could open again, Bill, with Wiggles at his heels, went out into the sunshine, whistling the challenging song from the first act of "Carmen."

I went to my room and wrote a letter, which, however, I was destined never to send, to Richard Warren.

Peter's convalescence kept me occupied for several days. He had a number of sympathetic callers, from Annunciata to the Howells. I told Mercedes that I would expect her out often to amuse our impending poet, and she preened

her bright plumage a little and vowed that a new man would be a "God-send," looking at Bill the while. At which, with that long-drawn "Me-ow!" still ringing in my ears, I asked her and her parents to join us at dinner the night following Mr. Penny's expected arrival.

On the morning of that arrival Bill tossed over to me a letter from Uncle John Denton.

"There are messages in it for you," he said, and opened his long-stale New York *Times*.

I read the letter, and, as I returned it to the envelope, saw a second sheet which I had not noticed. Uncle John often sent me little enclosures in Bill's letters. Innocently I drew it out, unfolded it, and started to read.

"Damn!" said my husband without apology, reaching my side in two long steps, "I thought I had taken that out. Give it to me, Mavis!"

But I had already read enough.

"Have you unmasked 'Richard Warren' for Mavis yet?" wrote Uncle John, "and how does she like being the wife of her favorite poet? When are we to have the manuscript of the new volume? You're long overdue now, you miserable creature!"

"Give it to me!" said Bill.

I handed the note to him without a word. I couldn't have spoken, had my life depended on it.

He followed me to the door of my room.

"Mavis!" he said once or twice.

I put my hand on the latch.

"Don't speak to me!" I said.

In my room, I sat down by the window and tried to think what it all meant. For a time, I was incapable of directed thought. My dream came to me, the dream I had had so long ago, that nightmare in which my un-

known poet had changed to the semblance of the man I had met and disliked on meeting, William Denton. So it was true then! After a little, I thought of my letters, my silly, fragile girl-dreams, written for the One, mercilessly exposed to the eyes of the Other. In my desk drawer lay yet another letter, unmailed, thank God! A letter in which I had said I wanted him back, wanted the comfort and the understanding his letters had brought me once again. Fool — fool and blind! And all the time, this talented trickster had known and laughed: had written me the friendly, lovely letters with his tongue in his cheek: had even spoken to me of love!

I went over to the drawer and took out my Diary. All lies! Some day I must burn it. But not yet. It was like a living thing to me. The little blue book fell open and certain words leaped out at me: "Diary, I have found him. . . . I've the heart and brain and beautiful spirit of him, and all day long his name makes a happy spot in my consciousness. Richard Warren! Richard Warren! . . ."

I closed the book and laid it back with the letters. A great sheaf of thin, typewritten pages . . . all lies. . . .

Uncle John had been in the plot then: and Wright Penny. It was very clear to me now.

I took from my neck the jade lucky-charm which "Richard Warren" had sent me and flung it out of the window. Wiggles, prowling beneath, barked happily and set out to retrieve it. Even Wiggles was not mine! Nothing I had had was mine!

I laid my head on the desk and cried bitterly. It's hard to see the dreams go: to watch the castle you have builded on the shifting sands crumble and fall. These things had meant so much to me, ill and prisoned, and had continued

to make a little, inner life for me, after the physical prison doors had opened.

If only by a miracle I could have been back in Green Hill, in my rose-grey room, never to walk again, and with Richard Warren's letters coming to me, out of the Unknown.

Then I remembered . . . there was no Richard Warren.

CHAPTER XIII

After a long time, I heard a knock at my door.

"May I speak with you, Mavis, just for a moment?" said my husband.

I steadied my voice with an effort.

"I can't imagine that you have anything of interest to tell me," I answered, "Isn't it time you went to Havana to meet Mr. Penny?"

There was an exclamation, and suddenly the door was flung open and Bill came in.

"Look here," he said, "we've got to have this thing out once and for all."

I was standing, my wet handkerchief in a tight, hard wad in my hand.

"Please leave my room," I said coldly.

"Not till I've said what I want to. I'm sorry you found out — about the book. I was going to tell you — later. But now that you have, we can't ignore it. It was the merest coincidence that I met you before your first letter came. And I was deep in it, before I realized that you were bound to dislike me, as I really am,— and then I couldn't tell you. Things you said in your letters made it absolutely impossible for me. And for reasons of my own, I had preserved my incognito very carefully. Only Uncle John knew, and Wright and my Mother — and — your Father —"

Father! And his mother! The little "read-haired, blue-eyed" lady who had written to me: to whom I had confided my admiration for her son!

Minute by minute, shame was flooding me: shame and a terribly tired feeling.

"Does your mother know —?" I asked.

"That we are married? No," he answered, "I had reasons for not telling her just yet. She knows I am in Cuba, of course. You have never asked me about my people so I hardly thought it worth while to mention her to you — under the circumstances."

"I'm sorry it has turned out as it has," he said, after a pause. "You don't understand —"

I could agree with him there.

"I'm afraid not," I said.

He lifted his shoulders ever so slightly, a gesture of defeat.

"Please —" he said, but something in my eyes stopped him. His face grew very hard.

"I think," he said, "that you are making a mountain out of a molehill. A range of mountains. Because I wrote a few verses that struck your fancy: because you did not like the actual, flesh-and-blood author: because I preferred to hide behind my nom-de-plume, and because you choose to honor Richard Warren with your friendly regard —" he shrugged again, "and because, perhaps foolishly, I want to be liked for what I am, and not for what I set down on paper — I preferred to play what I fancied was a very charming little game — and now you accuse me of having cheated."

"I have nothing of the sort," I answered. "But did it not occur to you, during your 'little game' that you were playing with an opponent wholly innocent of the fact that she was playing blindfolded, and that the cards were — stacked?"

We both heard the car drive up to the front door.

"Well," he said, "my cards are on the table now, Mavis."

"The car is waiting," I said. "You had best go. As far as I am concerned, the game is over. Richard Warren, as I knew him, never existed,— only a very clever young doctor who amused himself at my expense. Here," I said, turning to the open drawer, "are your letters. Take them, please. They would make good reading of the type which is called 'light fiction.'"

"Careful," said Bill, under his breath, and his hand shot out and caught my arm, "careful, Mavis! You are going just a little too far."

I twisted my arm away.

"And you —?" I asked furiously, "and — *you*?"

"I beg your pardon," he said, and the clear flame of anger leaped into the steel-blue eyes.

The door closed behind him. I stood for a moment, quite still, rubbing the bruised place on my arm which his fingers had made.

Richard Warren's letters lay on the floor. I caught them up, hurried to the living room. There was a burning log on the hearth, and under Bill's hostile eyes, as he gathered up his hat and gloves, I put the sheets in the fire.

They writhed, shot high in flame, and blackening, fell to ashes. Something in me cried out at that — they had been so dear, so dear.

"Have you my letters?" I asked him, rising and dusting off my hands.

"No," he replied, "I never keep letters."

It was the one redeeming fact that had come to my knowledge that day. I mentioned this, and went past him, into my own room again.

It seemed to me that, in an hour's space, I had lived many years and grown very old.

When I heard the car drive off, I went out on the verandah with Peter and played with him for a time before I dressed. I wanted to look my prettiest for Mr. Penny. And I blessed a kindly Providence that he was to interrupt my wholly impossible *ménage-à-deux*. And one determination I made: as soon as I returned to Green Hill, I would take steps to be free again. Father would soon get used to the idea: it would hurt him, of course, but someone is always being hurt. Travel — perhaps Father would take me to the Continent. But never again to the tropics. I had had enough of their soft, friendly ways and their treachery. When it was necessary that Uncle John Denton be told of the predestined fiasco of my marriage, I for one, would not shirk it. Bill was his nephew, but I was the daughter of his dearest friend, and he had cared for me since I was a baby. Sometimes, quite recently, I had fancied that he had cared, too, for my mother. But at all events, he would not be angry with me when he knew. Of that much I was certain.

It was a very cordial and sparkling hostess who met her guest and her husband at the door. I had put on the little white voile which, of all my daytime frocks, I thought the most becoming. I had dressed my hair high and thrust a wonderful orchid through my mauve belt. My cheeks were burning and I had a moment of stage-fright as I heard the wheels of the car on the drive. It would not be easy to carry it off, to hide my hurt and my shame — but pride helps wonderfully, always, in any situation, and I was quite satisfied with the girl who looked back at me from the long mirror in the living

room, as I passed it on my way to the verandah. But although all the stains of crying had gone from my eyes and left them bright, they were different eyes than the ones which had read the first lines of Uncle John's letter. Brown eyes, and big — but with all the dreams washed from them. Perhaps it was better so.

"A very hearty welcome, Mr. Penny," I said, smiling, as our slight, blonde guest untangled himself from his bags and jumped to the step, "it's good to see you again."

"For heaven's sake, Mrs. Denton," he expostulated, not heeding my greeting, but taking both my hands in his, "don't ruin my first impression of this ripping place and of this miraculous You by pinning that awful label on me. Do you think," he begged, "that you could manage 'Wright'?"

"In fair exchange for 'Mavis,'" I answered, smiling.

"You're on!" he said, dropping my hands after a vigorous clasp, "that is to say, if Bill has no objection."

Bill turned from a colloquy with Wing and Silas and waved benevolently in our direction.

"Not an objection," he answered gaily. "Mavis has me trained. Her word is, naturally, my law."

If that was the tone he wished to adopt, I was convinced that here, at least, was a game which two could play.

"Bill is a very satisfactory husband," I confided to Wright, pleasantly. "He and I have discovered the best basis possible for matrimony."

"What's that?" asked Wright, as we went into the living-room. "Lord, you lucky people, what a wonderful house!"

"Isn't it?" I said, and then, answering the question, "A mutual platform of Liberty, Independence and —"

"Love!" said Wright, triumphantly.

"How did you guess it?" asked Bill, following his guest.

I laughed, a little hysterically, and bade Bill show Wright to his room. After which, with a sense of having scored, I waited for the men near the dining-table, luncheon having been announced.

"We're late today," I said, as we all sat down. "I postponed the sacred meal a little to allow you to arrive."

"It's only one-thirty," objected Wright, looking at his watch.

"I know, but one does things differently in Guayabal," I said, explaining our usual routine.

"Some life!" said the newly initiated. "Suits me. Let's stay on here forever. I imagine," he went on, turning to include us both in his remark, "that nothing could have been more perfect for the *lune de miel*."

Bill was silent, but I agreed hastily.

"And now tell us about Santiago," I said.

The recital occupied most of the conversational part of the meal pleasantly enough.

"See my pretty senoritas?" asked Bill, passing the cigarettes.

"Cuban?" inquired Wright, taking one. "That's good — I've developed a passion for them. No, not a senorita. All I saw were at least ninety and weighed a ton."

"I've got just the girl for you!" said Bill and I, simultaneously.

Wright laughed.

"The same one?" he asked, with interest.

"No, our tastes differ," I answered, "the one I have

in mind is little and round and brown-haired. She's delightful."

"And mine," said Bill, "is just the right height, just the right shape, and as dark-haired and creamy-skinned as a Spanish princess. She is half Spanish, too, which means — temperament."

"Very interesting," said Wright. "Bring 'em both on. But I like amber-colored hair and brown eyes myself. Did you corner the market on the combination, Bill?"

"Of course," answered Bill gravely, "there aren't two like Mavis. That mould was broken."

"Lucky for me," agreed Wright, sighing. "I want to stay a carefree bachelor. I'm susceptible enough, Lord knows,— and very guileless. But my appearance protects me, as well as a certain modesty, not to say timidity, of manner. I've not your looks, nor your way with the wimmin, you handsome bridegroom," he concluded affectionately, smiling at Bill.

"Do tell me," I asked, leaning back in my great, carved chair, quite conscious that it served as an effective background for my hair, "about Bill's past. I can't get a word out of him on the subject."

There was a spark of admiration in the glance Bill shot me — an involuntary tribute.

"Wait till we're alone," whispered Wright, mysteriously. "I could a tale unfold — ! Enough to turn your hair grey. Broken hearts all over the place — he just stepped on 'em. Anonymous letters, begging for a lock of hair or an old glove! There have been times when your husband, Madame, has been forced to assume a disguise!"

"You colossal idiot," said Bill amiably.

"Don't listen to him, Mavis," urged Bill's best friend. "Listen to me instead!"

"I'm willing to be convinced," I answered. "And now that you're both on your second cigarette, shall we walk about the place a little? Bill," I went on, turning to him, very sweetly, "would you mind running to my room and getting my big, lavender shade hat — ? It's right on the bureau."

For a moment I thought that he would shake me. I knew he wanted to. But, instead, he swung obediently away and took his revenge in a careless "All right, dear!" as he went off.

"Isn't he a peach!" mused Wright aloud, watching admiringly the broad-shouldered figure across the room.

"You've known him long?" I asked, in order to avoid answering.

"Roommates at Princeton," he replied. "Those were the good old days! There never was a more popular man in college than old Bill! I basked in reflected glory all the time. He was always the King Pin among us, whether it was football, or writing skits, or drumming the piano."

"You must have a lot in common," I suggested, "especially your poetry —"

Wright's round, blue eyes grew rounder than ever.

"He's told you!" he gasped.

"Certainly," I said, smiling to cover the pain in my heart, "did you think he could keep it from me? Besides, I half-guessed it all the time."

"I told Bill that," said my guest, triumphantly, and then, as Bill emerged from my room, gingerly carrying the hat, as if it were a species of lavender lydite, "Well

Richard Warren, I suppose by now your wife is your severest critic!"

The hat fluttered from Bill's grasp. I shrieked. But he caught it again deftly.

"Here you are," he said, handing it to me, and went on, "My kindest critic, you mean, but — my critic always."

"What do you think of the new book?" asked Wright of me, as stopping only to collect Peterkins, we went from the house, down the long avenue of palms. "I've only seen a bit, but I tell him it's better than the first — surer, more mature, bigger in every way."

"She hasn't seen it," answered Bill, hastily. "I don't want her to for a while yet."

"Oh," Wright nodded understandingly, "I see."

Just what he saw was beyond me, but I said, with a little sigh,

"I'm so impatient —"

"You couldn't be that," said my husband, "not even when it comes to my new book."

"Very pretty," observed Wright, regarding us both, impartially.

"Isn't she?"

This was too much. I turned the conversation in the direction of our coming dinner party and to a discussion of hibiscus-bloom. But all through that afternoon through the banter, the sparkling surface talk, of dinner that night, through the hours before I fell asleep, I was trying to adjust myself to the fact that it was, after all, Bill who had written *The Lyric Hour*; who had so beautifully said so many true and lovely things: who was a very high-hearted poet.

No matter how little of his real self he had shown me

in his letters, regardless of the obvious misfit of his poems and his living personality, he had written those poems: they were his. And they must have sprung from some eternal and true fount of beauty in his nature, or else all books lied and all the poets who ever lived to gladden the world with their songs were tricksters and jesters, with a command of rythmical English and no more. I could not believe that. And so, I must believe that my husband had written truly and sung faithfully, from his heart. And that is what I could not understand, could not reconcile with him, himself. He had hurt me, had wounded my pride beyond endurance: I hated him, I wished myself free of his mere presence: but I was, in the last analysis, forced to admit his genius, and forced to acknowledge his power. Richard Warren had never existed, not the Richard Warren I had built up from a slender volume of verse and a drawer-full of letters. But William Denton did exist, very solidly, and for me, distastefully. And William Denton had written *The Lyric Hour.*

It may not be difficult, given certain conditions, to hate a poet, but it seemed too bad.

The following night our very informal dinner took place. We had asked some other people, to make up a party of ten, and so we had quite a formidable array of "valor and beauty" around the long, refectory table. Mr. and Mrs. Howells and their daughter, the Chinese Minister and his wife, Bobby Willard and his sister Ruth, Wright, Bill and myself, all rather diplomatically placed, made up the group. It was a rather amusing, and incidentally, an excellent meal. Over the massed orchids on the table, I could see Wright almost feverishly attentive

alternately, to Ruth Willard in pale-blue on his left, and to Mercedes, in an amazing frock of black lace, a cluster of orange flowers at her girdle, seated between him and my husband. At my end of the table I had Mr. Howells and the courteous gentleman from the Orient. And Mrs. Howells, at Bill's right, watched indolently her daughter's radiant progress and applied herself, mutely, to the business of eating. In consequence, Mercedes, during the greater part of the meal, drove tandem; and it was really pretty to watch — only, by the salad course, it had grown monotonous.

After dinner we had two tables of bridge. Fortunately, I played rather a good game, Father having taught me patiently, in order to provide one more time-killer, during my shut-inism. As we were ten, two were left to play the piano, to sit out on the verandah, to stroll about the grounds. I had cleverly manoeuvered that Wright and Ruth be left, but something went wrong, and Bill, announcing that he did not care to play, was joined by Mercedes, who insisted that the only rule she knew was "not to trump her partner's ace." I fancied, however, that she was well equipped with the finesse instinct.

"And even that I often forget," she said, laughing. "Me, I have so little use for rules!"

So it eventually and naturally came about that Bill and Mercedes stayed out of the game, joined now and then by whoever was dummy.

For a while they remained at the far end of the room, at the piano — Bill, black and white in his dinner clothes, dreaming over the keys, Mercedes, leaning on the piano, her huge orange feather fan at her lips, singing snatches of Spanish songs from behind its shelter, her dark eyes glowing. It was, I was forced to admit to Mrs. Howells,

playing at my table, a pretty picture, softened and romantic in the flicker of fire light which shone over the two and danced on the mahogany case of the Steinway.

Later, they went out: Wright followed them presently, in his momentary freedom as dummy, for "a breath of air and a cigarette."

I made a Grand Slam.

Wright, returning, to take his place, paused to regard the score over my shoulder. and to whisper,

"Is that the girl Bill picked out for me? What does he take me for, a lion-tamer?"

"Hush!" I said, conscious of Mrs. Howells' proximity. But she was criticizing her husband's last play and did not hear us.

It was twelve o'clock before our guests left. Mercedes, in a gorgeous black and orange cloak, seemed reluctant to depart.

"I've had *such* a wonderful evening!" she told me, "and Billy was *so* entertaining!"

I had always disliked the schoolgirl manner of talking in exclamations and italics.

Wright, bidding me good-night, remarked, with mock gravity,

"I'm going to buy a whip and a gun tomorrow, Mavis! That Howells girl needs a dressing down."

"Dressing down?" I asked, not a little maliciously, recalling with inner amusement, Mercedes' somewhat revealing gown.

But if Wright did not understand me, as I hoped he would not, my husband did, and his inevitable "Meow!" followed me into my room and lingered there for some time.

War to the knife — !

CHAPTER XIV

GUAYABAL, CUBA—
and Heaven knows what date.

Father, dearest —

We have enjoyed your letters so much, and I am glad that you have Uncle John to bear you out in your statements that you are almost well and strong again, otherwise it would seem too good to be true. What a fright you gave us all, you dear Daddy.

It is perfect here: if only you were with us I would be the happiest girl in the world. Peter is all better again. I hope I shall never live through another night like the one when we nearly lost him. Bill is wonderful with children — I never saw such patience and tenderness and sanity.

We see quite a lot of Mercedes. I am sure she would enchant you, she is so pretty. But I should be jealous, you know, if she ever adopted you as a second father, as she threatened to do when I showed her your picture. Your picture, by the way, is the next thing to the flesh and blood you! I talk to it by the hour.

Bill has confessed the Richard Warren hoax! Quite involuntarily. I must admit surprise, but of course I am terrifically proud of him. And you knew all along, you wretch, and never told me!

It was amusing of you to scold me for not going to the races. But crowds — the bare idea of them confused me so. However, Bill insisted upon reading that part of your letter and carried me off, on your authority, if you please, to sit for hours in a funny little box and watch the people and the horses and smell the track and disgrace myself by rising suddenly and shouting as my horse came in!

I won twelve dollars and am very haughty about it!

I think if I had ever seen a horse-race while I was ill, could such a thing have happened, I would have died. Such sheer, wonderful poetry of motion! Bill laughed at me and promises me more thrills when the racing season is on in New York. He says the Cuban race horses are a "lot of junk"— but he doesn't realize what it meant to me. No one can realize what it means to me, to be unfettered, to walk, to feel well, to be hostess in my own (borrowed) home, *to be like other girls!* It is no longer a miracle, of course. Nothing is, for very long, except perhaps — life. And I look back on all my invalid years with amazement: it seems a dream, a fantasy, remote and impossible. It is as though I had always lived — as now,— really *lived,* Daddy dearest!

My letters are terribly long! And I write you much oftener than you me. We all send our love. Peter and I go further — we send kisses.

Stay safe. Stay well, and write to your happy

MAVIS.

SUNSET LAKE,
SOMEWHERE IN CANADA

We have no calendar here, my small, enchanting daughter, and so there are no such things as dates, only nights and days and splendid undivided hours.

I was happy to have your letter. And you must not worry about me — I feel twenty years younger and, so John says, look it. You will not know your old Dad when you see him.

I miss you, my dear. This is our first separation. I could not stand another. I hope that you have persuaded Bill that my home must still be your home, when we are all together again. At first it seemed unwise, two young things starting out in life, saddled with the presence of a third person. For I am a third person now — it is right that I should be. But I am very selfish. I want to enjoy my girl, this new, wonderful manifestation of her. And there is room

in the old house for us all: you may tinker with it as you please, add where you will, and I will keep from under your feet. I am certain that Bill will have all the practice he needs to keep him from getting rusty — even in Green Hill. And good old Mac is quite ready to abdicate in his favor. How splendidly it has all worked out! Never a day passes that I do not thank God for your health, for your happiness, and for my own reprieve.

Give my love to my son-in-law. I will answer his letter shortly. Tell Peter I've a present for him — we've a guide up here who is a genius with a pen-knife and a scrap of wood.

And inform Sarah that the last snap-shot of her you sent me is a marvel! She's entirely too rejuvenated for Green Hill.

To you, my child, the tenderest affection of your devoted

FATHER.

I think, perhaps, that the hardest task I had, during the lazy days in Cuba, was writing to Father. There were times when the irony of the situation moved me to something very like laughter. A bitter form of mirth, and one I never thought to know. As carefully as any novelist, I built up my little fictionary happiness, evolved my plot, drew my characters, retaining enough of truth, and committing seven times seven sins of omission. It seemed to me, at times, that it was not I who wrote, but another Mavis, a happy Mavis, living in a tropical dream, companioned and at peace,— the Mavis I might have been — if —

What tears my guardian angel must have shed! What blotted pages must have soiled the ledger!

I wondered very often, if lies we tell to spare others are counted lies in the heavenly books. After all, surely

we are not judged by earthly standards, there must be a larger vision and a more tolerant viewpoint. And sometimes, where the truth ended and where falsehood began, seemed hidden from me: times when the dream seemed real and reality a dream —

CHAPTER XV

Sometimes I think it would be sweet,
To go out, as a candle in the wind,
Whose little flame flares up, in brilliance fleet,
To light the secret corners of the mind,
And calls to being for a heart-beat's space,
Long-buried loves and dreams illuminate;
The household furniture of that small place
Where Life has dwelt; old, half-forgotten hate,
Young, brave belief: dim-colored hopes, and fears,
The driftwood memories: grey ghosts of pain,
Which haunt us down the long, relentless years,
All salient, living, vivid, once again,
In that last, eager, leaping ray of light,
Which snuffs out in the passing of a breath
From windows open to the healing Night,
Swift-blown from the quiet Wind of Death . . .
A throbbing moment, wherein all things cease;
A sudden plunging into kindly gloom;
A blessed darkness and a perfect peace;
And utter silence in an empty Room.

I had gone, with my writing things, to heap pillows on the lawn beneath that curious tropical "Sabre" tree, which is entirely covered with thick, wicked spikes, magnified and dangerous thorns. This tree wears smooth with age, they say — like a number of human beings, perhaps! — and the natives hold it in superstitious awe, believing it to be the tree which formed the Cross. They will not cut one down or in any way deface it.

Lying prone, elbows propped on my gay cushion, my chin in my hands, I contemplated the last verse I had made, considered a title, decided on "Ultimus," and then, weighting the sheet with a round, yellow orange, I rolled over on my back, and crossing my arms beneath my head looked up at the sky.

It was a wonderful morning, cloudless, perfect, not too oppressively warm. And it was the first breathing spell I had had in several days. The business of having as a house guest an eligible young bachelor, of charm and astonishing vitality, was a little wearing. And I was glad when the day came on which Wright concluded that an hour or so in the saddle, with Bill as escort would be both beneficial to his constitution and instructive mentally.

Quite aside from the arduous task of exhibiting Havana and environs to a tireless young man, the effort of "keeping up appearances" had really begun to tell on me. Wright was particularly keen-sighted, and I more than once fancied that he had caught a glimpse of the black waters under the thin verbal ice upon which Bill and I so carelessly skated.

My husband and I had not been alone together since the arrival of his friend. I had seen to that. When we were not in Havana, or at the country club, there were people at the "Palms." And to insure perfect satisfaction for everyone concerned, I had asked Mercedes Howells to bring a bag, and spend a few days in the country. She had accepted with alacrity, and there remained to me but a few hours of comparative peace before she descended upon the household.

I looked across at the mountains: purple blue they were, clear-cut against a marvelous sky. The air was very still.

I could hear Arthur shrieking from the house. He had learned a number of fine, full-bodied Cuban-Spanish oaths lately, and was employing them in his most wheedling manner on Nora.

The ox-carts went by on the road below. A bird swayed on the bourganvilla vine and sang. Down in the palm-grove I saw the flick of a peacock tail, and the orchids, themselves like lavender birds, in the distance, flowering from the smooth palm trunks.

My eyes closed and I slept.

When I awoke, someone was sitting cross-legged beside me, whistling "Sally in our Alley."

I saw puttees and riding breeches, a hand holding a cigarette, and finally a blonde countenance which was turned upward to the sky.

"Hello," I said. "How long have you been here?"

"Hours," he answered. "Mavis Denton, you talk in your sleep, you do, somethin' awful!"

I sat up abruptly.

"What did I say?" I demanded.

"First you snored some —"

"I don't snore!"

"You do,— Bill told me so. 'Wright,' he says to me, 'don't you never marry a girl who snores.'"

There was no use arguing with Wright in a silly mood.

"Go on," I said, resigned to heaven alone knew what eccentricities of speech and disclosure.

"I'm going. First you snores a bit, as I remarked before I was so rudely interrupted. Who raised you, anyway, Mavis? Don't you know little girls must never contradict, interrupt, or otherwise distract old gentlemen? Well, after the snore — musical, it was — 'Bill!'

you says, entreating-like —' Bill,' you says, right out loud. And then, just like a movie heroine, ' Never ! ' you shouts, ' Never ! ', and you clinched your hands and ground your teeth as no lady had oughter ! "

" I never heard of anything so silly," I said, " You're making it all up ! "

Wright laughed.

" I'm not, truly," he said, " although perhaps I have rendered it in a slightly more lurid manner than you did. But it's true, and I'm going to ask Bill what it's all about, so there ! "

" Don't you dare ! " I said.

" All right, I won't, if you will promise me never to blush again like you have been doing for the last three minutes. It is very disturbing, to a struggling poet who has long sought fresher similes for Dawn and all that sort of thing. You provided the simile, all right, but who in time could rhyme with Mavis ? "

At the mention of poetry, my hand unconsciously went toward the sheet of paper beside me. The orange rolled away and the wind provokingly caught the paper and fluttered it.

" What's this ? " said the audacious youth beside me. " Ha ! I see Bill's fine Italian hand in this —"

He picked up the paper, regardless of my pleas, and scanned it with a practised eye.

" Your writing. Amanuensis now, eh ? Hm — that doesn't sound like Bill. Wait a moment, I never saw such illegible caligraphy. At least one member of a doctor's family ought to write so a fellow can read it —"

He laid the paper down.

" Bill didn't write that," he said, suddenly serious, " who did ? You, Mavis ? "

I nodded.

"Why, you little wretch," he cried out, delightedly. "Bill never told me a word —"

"He doesn't know," I said. "No-one knows. Please don't tell him. I had thought of some day showing what I had done to Uncle John Denton. But I've decided not to, now. I didn't mean anyone to know —"

Wright picked up the paper and read the verse again. I watched him, in a curious mental state. Part of me resented bitterly that even so good a friend should have dragged out to the revealing light of day, my wistful secret of song: and yet, another part of me, back in my brain, said dully, "It really doesn't matter — now."

"I'm a better critic than I am a poet," said Wright, after a time. "I think you have a gift, Mavis. This," he flicked the paper with a thumb and finger, "has grace and delicacy. It's not good, of course,— not according to — well, say, Bill's standards,— but it has promise. I won't tell Bill, if you'd rather not, although I think he would help you a great deal — and I'm sure he'd go quite out of his head with excitement. May I see, sometime, anything else you have? Only, for the love of Mike, what's the idea of being so morbid? Haven't you happier things to write about, child?"

I put my hand over his,

"Sure you won't tell?" I begged.

"I swear, by all the Muses," he replied, "Bill shall never know, from me."

"Know what?" asked Bill, appearing disconcertingly around the tree.

I snatched my hand from Wright's and felt myself grow scarlet. We must both have looked guilty, for

Wright's guileless blonde face reflected my embarrassment.

"Secret!" said Wright, firmly.

"Oh, I see."

Bill glanced from one to the other of us, to the paper in Wright's hand, and then considerately walked off.

"Lunch is ready," he remarked, over his shoulder. "Been calling you for about ten minutes."

Wright helped me to my feet.

"Close call," he said.

"Hush!" I said, "for my husband was still within ear-shot.

"Is he always like that?" asked Wright, anxiously, as we went toward the house.

"Like what?" I asked, in all innocence.

"Positively green-eyed with rage if you are alone for half a minute with another man — even so harmless a specimen as myself?"

"Don't be silly," said I, with finality.

"I'm not, and if he is going to be jealous as all that, why don't you get to him first before he can accuse you, and demand that he cease baying at the moon with that human leopardess who vamps around these diggings?"

"She'll be here this afternoon, on a visit," I announced, laughing. "Why don't you monopolize her yourself?"

"I never went in for that kind, said Wright with firmness. "I might get scratched. Gentle and soft-spoken, that's my type. Besides, Miss Howells is going to look just like her mother, and that's a warning to any man!"

That afternoon Mercedes arrived. Her bag proved to be a trunk, and within an hour of her arrival, she had charmed the kitchen, made eyes at Silas, called Wright

by his first name, hurt her finger — with resultant medical attention, and confided to me that she "hated men!"

After which, she departed in the direction of the palm-grove with "Billy" and "Wright."

I went to her room and viewed her gowns, hanging, like flowers, in her innovation steamer-trunk. After which, I went to my own room and took stock of my chiffon and satin armor.

Bill came back at tea time.

"Wright is reciting poetry to Mercedes on the stone bench under the orchids, and sketching her between verses," he announced, "but I crave more material food."

"You might have stayed on," I suggested, passing him the sandwiches, "and made the recitation competitive."

"Competitive," he remarked, choosing a ripe, red disk of tomato, flanked with thin circles of bread, and biting into it reflectively, "calls for numbers. I don't enjoy being part of a mob-scene, or a mass-meeting."

"Here comes the Meistersänger," I said, as Wright came up the steps, with Mercedes unnecessarily on his arm.

Selecting chairs, cups, plates and food, our guests joined us around the wicker tea-wagon.

"He is not a nice young man at all," said Mercedes frankly, exhibiting a rather clever little pastel of herself, "this Wright. He says to me the most beautiful poetry, so sad and so lovely, all about unrequited love and dead girls floating in moonlit pools, and when, touched to the heart, I weep a little, he laughs and says it is wonderful how much tragedy one can turn out at fifty cents a line!"

She opened ocular fire on her host as she spoke, and Bill responded nicely.

"I'm sure," he said gravely, "that Wright will have plenty of happier inspiration now."

And said Wright to me, under his breath,

"In all justice, one must concede her a certain amount of beauty. I don't think she's going to look like her mother after all."

"Whispering's rude," said Mercedes severely, "isn't it, Billy?"

So the conversation became general again.

At six, Bill drove over to the neighboring plantation to fetch Peterkins, who had spent the day there with the Crowell children, back to supper. When he returned, he looked rather serious.

"What's up?" asked Wright idly, from the canvas verandah swing.

"Nothing much," he answered, "that is, not yet. Run along to Sarah, Peter,— there's a good fellow."

But I knew that something was wrong, and after the child had left us, I asked quietly,

"Tell us, Bill, please!"

"Crowell's been having some trouble with the natives," he answered, frowning. "It may blow over — and it may spread. They're like a lot of sheep. But I feel responsible to Reynolds, even if Silas is in charge. The people have a healthy respect for Silas, and they trust him,— but —"

"What sort of trouble?" asked Wright, practically.

"Oh, threats — and little gatherings — and demonstrations. They are always restless, and the slightest thing sets them off. Crowell discharged one of his surliest men the other day. Unfortunately, the chap is related to half Guayabal. We've some of his cousins and brothers and uncles on this place, I suppose! Anyway,

this Miguel person has been going about trying to incite the people to open enmity against the resident Americans. Of course, it probably won't amount to a hill of beans, but you never know where you stand."

"Haven't they just finished a comic-opera revolution here?" asked Wright. "Seems to me I read something about it."

"There are always uprisings," answered Mercedes, covering a yawn, "generally in the eastern districts — nearer Santiago. They are like children, these people."

She turned, with a shrug which dismissed the subject, to Bill.

"Come," she urged prettily, "play my accompaniment for me. I want to sing you some of the old songs my little, Spanish grandmother taught her grandchildren."

We had a little while before we need dress for dinner, and so Bill followed her obediently into the living-room, and presently, her light, sweet voice floated out to Wright and me on the verandah.

"Sings well, doesn't she?" said Wright.

But I was not attending.

"Doesn't Bill seem worried to you?" I asked, more casually than my mental state warranted.

"Who? Bill? Why no, I don't think so," he answered, absently. "He's probably put all this native business out of his head by now. Bill's not an alarmist. Wonder what that song is — quaint, isn't it?"

But I was not satisfied, and after dinner, I deliberately found an opportunity, contrary to custom, to speak with my husband alone.

"About the Crowell plantation," I said, "is there any danger to them from the natives — to us?"

"There is always more or less danger," he answered,

with the formal courtesy which had recently characterized all of our infrequent, unattended encounters, "but I do not think we need worry. Still, I shall forbid Peter to go out in the fields, or beyond the house alone, and I must ask you also to be careful. I'm sorry to curtail your freedom — but, if you don't mind —?"

Perversely, I suddenly "minded" very much.

"I won't run any risks," I answered, with mental reservations.

"There you two are again! Sneaking off, whispering, heads together! Aren't you just a little tired of twosing by now?"

It was Wright, coming up behind us. I thought I detected a little, cynical gleam in Mercede's eyes, and laid my hand defiantly on Bill's arm.

"Are *you* tired?" I asked him gaily.

He laid his free hand over mine.

"Do men tire of life?" he counter questioned, gallantly, and I knew a swift admiration for his histrionic powers. For his voice went a little deep, quite suddenly, and the hand over mine shook.

"Nice answer," said Wright critically, "quite emotional, but open to argument. Of course men tire of life. Some of them commit suicide, some of them drink, others get married! The remedy is entirely according to temperament.

"Horrid man!" said Mercedes, pouting. And answering amiably, "Am I not?" Wright guided her to the bridge table, having persuaded her at dinner that, with him as partner, she could trump his ace to her heart's content.

As we followed them, Bill said, very low,

"Remember — not to go out alone, Mavis."

"I'll remember," I answered, non-committally, and we sat down to the cards.

It was interesting to observe that Mercedes, her previous assertions to the contrary, played a much better game than any of us, excepting, perhaps, Bill.

So, after all, it had been from choice and not lack of knowledge, that she had not joined the game the night of the dinner. Which looked as if someone else had been manoeuvering besides myself. But I forgave her. She was so pretty that one could not expect her to always play quite "according to Hoyle."

CHAPTER XVI

I arrived in the kitchen the following morning, to discuss luncheon with Norah, and found the entire kitchen-force massed at the screened-door, watching Mercedes coquetting with Arthur. There was a temptation to draw an analogy between the brilliantly-plumaged, addle-pated bird and the decorative girl who stood at the cage-door, poking her white fingers perilously through the wiring and cooing to him in softest Spanish. It must be admitted, that weeks of painstaking effort on my part to win Arthur to a display of friendliness toward me, had resulted in nothing. But ten minutes with Mercedes had proved his undoing: the bird was positively maudlin. I came out to the cage, and at once the half-closed orbs of Arthur underwent an unflattering change. He opened them to their widest and bleakest and said, hoarsely sarcastic, "Pretty darling! Darling! Bow-wow-wow! Carramba!" at which Mercedes exclaimed delightedly,

"Oh, isn't he clever! Who taught him that?"

"The swearing, or the pet names?" I answered, stooping to say goodmorning to Wiggles, "I haven't the remotest idea."

"Billy?" suggested my guest, touching her perfectly dressed hair with highly manicured finger-tips.

"Possibly," I answered. "He invariably barks and then swears at me, before luncheon."

"Billy or Arthur?" inquired Mercedes with interest.

I laughed.

"Have you seen either of the men this morning?" I asked. "I heard them go out early."

"They went to Crowell's," she answered. "I saw them off. They will not be back before tea, Billy told me."

I tried to look as if I had heard these plans before, and merely forgotten them for a moment.

"How nice!" I said, insincerely, "We will have a nice, long day together — with no disturbing male element," I added maliciously.

"I will like that too," said Mercedes, with great unexpectedness. "You never let me talk to you alone, Mavis, and" she finished with a funny little undercurrent of wistfulness in her pretty voice, "I have no friends my own age — women friends, I mean."

I had grown to be a little annoyed at my guest, but somehow, her simple statement opened up a vista before me which I had not dreamed existed. The child seemed, after all, hungry for companionship. It was out of the question that she should find it with her own indolent mother, who treated her as if she were half plaything and half infant; or with her father, whose attitude toward her was a curious commingling of affectionate despotism and anxiety: and the basis on which she met all her many men-satellites was not one guaranteed to produce comradeship.

I put my arm through hers and took her into the kitchen with me. After my inconsiderable domestic task was completed, we went out on the verandah together, armed with sewing. Mercedes sewed beautifully, an art which her early convent education had taught her, and I took a real aesthetic pleasure in watching the smooth, dark head, bent over the fine linen in her lap.

"What are you making?" I asked her, idly.

She exhibited the very feminine garment: exquisitely embroidered and sewn with the most exact and even of tiny stitches.

"I wish I could sew like that," I said, enviously, "but I should think you would ruin your eyes."

She raised to mine the tremendous pools of liquid darkness in question.

"But no," she asid. "All Spanish girls are clever with the needle. The Sisters taught me when I was very young."

I had been, with the Howells, to one of the convents near Havana, and I recalled now the sweet, patient faces of the nuns, and the marvelous work they showed us. Some of it lay in one of my trunks now, a present to Mrs. Goodrich from Bill and me. The thought of Mercedes behind the austere cloister walls was incongruous.

"Were you long with the nuns?" I asked her.

"Seven years," she answered, and then, amazingly, "I was very happy there — for a long time I wanted to take the veil, but Father was simply horrified at the idea."

I was somewhat horrified myself.

"I can't imagine it," I said flatly.

"Why?"

I didn't answer for a moment, and she went on,

"But I know why — you think me very light and frivolous, do you not, Mavis?"

"It would be difficult," I answered cautiously, "to imagine you as a nun!"

"They are good women," she said, and was silent.

Suddenly I realized that I knew very little more about this girl than I had known on the boat coming down to

Havana, and yet, I had been with her almost constantly ever since.

"Didn't you care for college?" I inquired, rather diffidently.

Her great eyes lighted up.

"It was wonderful — in some ways —" she said slowly, "so many girls, of all classes, gathered together. At first I could not understand. At home, you know, one is very careful whom one knows. It is changing a little now. I remember I was scandalized, my first months at college, to find that the President of the Senior class was a waitress in one of the campus houses — actually waiting on the table! It was too incredible! I wrote home, and Mother begged Father to send for me at once. She was even more shocked than I! But Father laughed, she said, and told her it would do me good. He said it was high time that a little of my American blood came to the fore. Later I learned that this girl, the Senior President, had practically worked her way through the four years of college. She was the daughter of a very poor man — a peasant, we would call him. And yet there was hardly a girl in that great college who would not have given everything she had for the respect and admiration and love which that quiet, plain-featured girl had won and held from students and faculty alike."

"You too?" I asked.

"I, too," said Mercedes simply. She bent her head a little lower over the white fabric in her lap and went on, not quite clearly. "I was not very popular. Some liked me, yes. They even asked me to their homes for the shorter vacations. But they liked me because I was 'different': because it was 'smart' to say that they had a Spanish-American girl as a friend: or because I was

pretty and bright and did not care much to study. But I made no real friendships."

I was, by now, very interested. Here was a cross-section of life that I had no knowledge of. A feeling of sympathy stirred in me: this gay, alien little creature, with the blood of two widely dissimilar nations warring in her, coming fresh from her convent to the democratic freedom of an American college. I said,

"Tell me a little about it all, Mercedes. I only know college-life second hand, for, as perhaps Bill has told you, I was a helpless invalid for eleven years. But I was fortunate in my friends, although I had few of my own age, and in a Father who was my greatest playfellow and my most understanding comrade."

The quick, facile tears rose to the big eyes. She pulled her chair a little closer and laid her warm, vibrant hand on mine.

"I didn't know," she said. "I'm so sorry. Billy told me that you had been ill — but I didn't dream.— You're wonderful, Mavis," she said, "delicate and lovely as an orchid. I always feel clumsy and too highly-colored beside you. And you have been so kind and sweet —"

I grew very remorseful: my feelings toward Mercedes Howells had been anything but "kind and sweet." They had been distinctly critical and almost unfriendly. For the first time, I did not resent her easy use of my husband's given name: for the first time I realized the old truth that to know people is to like them.

I gave the narrow, high-bred hand a little squeeze.

"Don't be silly, child," I said lightly. "And tell me more about your American impressions."

"You sound just like the reporter who came on the boat, my first trip North," said Mercedes, with a little

giggle. "Such a nice young man! But the things he put in the paper about me! 'Beautiful Spanish-American heiress screams with delight at the first glimpse of her father's country.' I didn't really scream," she explained conscientiously, "but I talked more than I should have. Father wrote me quite an angry letter about it. He is very well known," she added, without pride, "and it annoyed him. He says no woman can hold her tongue, anyway! But how was I to know that the nice young man was a reporter?"

I had a vision of Mercedes, hands flying, eyes everywhere, babbling and bubbling for the *New York Press*. It was too amusing. No wonder Mr. Howells had been 'annoyed.'"

"Go on," I said encouragingly.

"The girls I went home with," she said, after a while, "they lived in wonderful houses and had such beautiful clothes. But I didn't like them, somehow. You see, at home we are very strictly brought up. After a girl is out, she has some freedom, of course, and, after she marries, it is quite different — she can do as she likes. And until Father had insisted upon my being educated in the States, my Mother had had all the care of me. And I was brought up as the Spanish girls are, as my Mother was in her own Madrid. These American girls I visited thought of nothing but good times. They spoke no language but their own —"

"How many do you speak, Mercedes," I interrupted, curiously.

"English, Spanish, French, of course," she answered, "and a little smattering of Italian and German. I had governesses until I was ten, and then I went to the convent. And much emphasis was laid on languages."

I suppressed a gasp, and she went on.

"It was from them — my college friends — that I learned that it is easy to deceive one's parents. And that it is quite right and proper to have as many cavaliers as one can. 'Scalp-hunting' they called it —"

I thought of Mercedes' not inadept efforts along the line of scalps, and thinking, asked,

"But haven't Spanish girls — and girls all over the world — very much the same ambitions along that line?"

Mercedes knitted her brows, and as she looked at me, I was startled, for, for the first time, I saw in her a very definite resemblance to her father. There was a strength of jaw there, to which the rounded, soft chin had blinded me: a certain Northern keenness in the Southern eyes.

"Why yes," she answered, "but it is — to marry that they — shall I say — hunt? But it was not that with my New York friends. They had no desire to marry: many of them told me that they would hate being tied down, that they disliked children. No, it was not to marry — but merely to play and to be amused —"

I laughed.

"It's the motive then," I said, "that makes the difference in your eyes?"

"Of course," she said frankly. "To marry, to have a family, to be mistress in one's own home, that is —"

"The legitimate ambition of every woman," I concluded for her.

"Si, Senora," she answered, laughing in spite of herself.

"But," I argued, "you must have met other American girls whose interest was not solely centered in the fine art of flirtation."

"I understood them — those you speak of, even less!"

said Mercedes guilelessly. "My roommate was such a one. She wanted to be an engineer: just fancy! And she was so pretty too!"

"An engineer!" I ejaculated, for even to my American mind this was an unusual ambition for my sex to harbor. "And she had no use for men, too?" I asked.

"That was just it," said Mercedes, in obvious wonderment. "She had any number of men friends: corresponded with them, saw them at dances: they even called upon her at college. But a flirt she was not. They were her friends, she said. And she was like another boy with them. I went to her home once, a little town in Massachusetts, and I could not understand her at all. She was like a sister to her mother, a son to her father, and a comrade to her dance-partners. It was too amazing!"

There was the whole thing in a nutshell, I thought. She could understand but not condone the promiscuous flirtations of her American sisters: but the girl who was comrade to a man, and friend, and who looked on him as such, and not as an extra "scalp" or a possible husband, was beyond her comprehension.

"But," I argued, "returning to the butterflies, surely, Mercedes, you have quite as much freedom now as any American girl. And, forgive me, my dear, but you employ it in much the same manner."

Her glance was mischievous and rather child-like.

"That has only been since my return home," she said. "Mother is not pleased, but Father says, 'let her go ahead.' And — as to what you say, I am trying very hard to be American now."

"Not the comrade sort, such as your mechanical roommate?" I suggested.

She regarded me in amazement.

"But most of the men I meet are Cubans," she stated. "Do you think *they* would understand it — if I could be like that little Mary Adams?"

I considered, shook my head.

"Of course not," she said, answering her own question. "They would laugh and shrug — and be, perhaps, disagreeable. They can accept such a manner in an American girl. They do not like it, or comprehend it, but some of them have learned their lesson. And they must respect it. But — in a Spanish girl — it would be unthinkable. Besides," she added frankly, "I couldn't —"

She was right. Temperamentally unfit, emotionally too highly developed.

"And — as to the flirting," she said shyly, "I — I like to attract people. I like to make them laugh and say nice things. And perhaps my American friends have taught me something of their methods."

"And your motive —?" I asked.

She stretched her graceful arms wide. Her hair had a blue sheen in the shaded light of the verandah and her skin was magnolia-white.

"I haven't any!" said Mercedes frankly.

"Not even a small gold band in the perspective?" I said.

She looked down at her ringless hands: at the heap of fragrant linen lying in her lap.

"This is to be part of my trousseau," she answered, indirectly, "part of what you call a 'Hope Chest.' All girls of my class sew a great deal and lay it all away until they marry. And, after all, I am not like my New York cousins, for where they say 'perhaps — when I get tired of playing,' I say, 'someday, when I meet the right man.'

And so, you see, I am not like my Mother's people either — not quite. For they say, 'someday when my parents are satisfied — and let us hope it will be soon!'"

I didn't wonder that Bill — that the men found her charming. The mixture of innocence and sophistication, the innate and the acquired worldliness was really delicious.

"Do you talk to many people like this?" I asked curiously.

"Of course not," she answered, wide-eyed. "I know of no one who would understand. There are times," she admitted, with a little sigh, "When I really do not understand myself."

At the luncheon table I found myself looking at Mercedes, half as if she were a stranger, half as if she were an old friend.

"I envy you and Bill, Mavis," she said, once, when Fong had left the room, "you have so much to make you happy. He's a very lucky man."

I smiled. It was not a subject on which I wished to be interrogated.

"And you," she went on, "are a lucky girl. He's awfully fine, that husband of yours."

She played for a moment with her tea-spoon, and looked at me, rather pathetically.

"I like the way American men are with their wives," she said, "I wish I could have met a Billy —"

I might have responded that, in a few months' time, my husband would be legally free to take an interest in such remarks, but I refrained.

"You must have met a number of men, in two years," I said.

"Not Billies," she answered firmly, "awfully young they were, and —" she paused.

Fong came in just then, and the conversation took a more discreet turn. After luncheon, siesta-ing in the two big swings down among the palms, I brought up the subject again.

"So, after all," I said, "the 'right man' must be an American, Mercedes?"

I had not calculated on the effect of my idle words. A vivid scarlet spread to the roots of the black hair.

"On the boat," she answered, "we talked, your Bill and I — and since then, also. And I have learned a little of the reverence for women that your fine men have: a little of the way they guard and protect them — not by bars and bolts and commands, but by love and chivalry and thoughtfulness. I have seen that too, in my Father, a little. But, after all, my Father married Mother, and so, it is different with him. And he has never talked to me as he would to the daughter, perhaps, of an American wife —"

I thought of my own Father and knew a swift pang of pity, for this rather rudderless little craft.

"It was through Billy that I got to know you," Mercedes went on —"he was always talking about you. And you — you always held me off —"

Something very warm and sweet crept into my heart, and I put my hand out, across the space between.

"I'm sorry," I said, "awfully sorry, Mercedes,— you see, perhaps I wasn't quite used to girls."

"You'll really be my friend now?" she asked, naïvely: and I was conscious that I spoke the whole truth as I answered,

"I am your friend, Mercedes,— never doubt it."

Our hands clasped on that, and within ten minutes, her quiet breathing told me that she slept. I lay awake a little longer, thinking very hard. So Bill had really seen the best of her after all. He had not told me, for I had never tried to know, even second hand. He would have let me go on believing the girl to be heartless and silly, and admiration-loving, nothing else. It was not fair! And then I stopped to realize that I had not *wanted* to believe her anything else. Before I fell asleep, I had absolved Mercedes Howells from deliberately trying to flirt with my husband. She would have been my friend more than his, had I wished her to be. Failing that, she had turned to the person, who, oddly enough, had apparently comprehended her little complexities. I looked over at the serene face, the heavy, white lids, with their weight of dark lashes, folded over the big eyes. A little smile curved the lovely, full mouth, and she slept, as a child sleeps, one hand under her soft cheek.

It was very still. The palm leaves rustled faintly over my head, and the sunlight fell hot and golden through the trees. My eyes closed in spite of myself, and with a very tender impulse toward my new friend, I turned on my side and slept.

CHAPTER XVII

"What are you two girls whispering about?" asked Wright, coming up behind us on the glassed-in porch of the Country Club.

"It is none of your affairs," responded Mercedes with dignity, "but as you are so rude as to ask, I will tell you that the last affair of the season is to be held at the home of Consuelo Mendez — a ball — next week. And I have asked Mavis if she will let me steal you for the evening — provided you have no objection. It will be amusing, I think, and you will meet many pretty girls."

"As to that, I would not have to leave Guayabal," said Wright politely, "but I am honored that you implore my escort —"

"Implore!" said Mercedes with scorn.

"Be careful," I warned. "She'll withdraw her invitation. And I'm sure you'd have a wonderful time. I shan't go, of course, although Senora Mendez has been gracious enough to include me in the invitation. And Bill declares he is too old for such festivities. But I have told Mercedes she may have you —"

"And welcome?" suggested Wright, tragically.

"I shall stop on at 'The Palms' till then," said Mercedes —"Mavis has asked me. And if you will come into Havana with me the day of the dance, my Mother will be very glad to have you stay with us over that night. For it will be a late party, of course — too late for you to return to Guayabal."

"Bully," said Wright with enthusiasm, "I'd love it. What does one wear?" he asked anxiously.

"Low neck and short sleeves," answered Bill, appearing from the locker rooms.

"Wright thinks," said Mercedes pensively, "that at an affair almost entirely within the Spanish-Cuban set, the gentlemen appear attired as *toreodores*."

Wright looked aggrieved.

"Not at all," he contradicted, "only the Anglo-Saxon fashions for men are utterly devoid of beauty. I wish I had lived some time back — in the satin knee-breeches and lace cuff period."

"But you're bow-legged!" objected Bill insultingly.

"I am not," said Wright indignantly. "Observe!" He thrust out a far from unshapely calf, in tweed knickers. "If my extremities show a slight tendency to bow, it is merely a sign of physical strength, and many years spent in the saddle and on the base-ball diamond."

Said Mercedes to me, in an aside.

"Now, you know, my Mother would never have listened to such a discussion — in Madrid!"

"She would never have had the opportunity," I whispered back.

"To return to the Mendez ball," said Wright, raising his voice, with intent. "I thought a simple flower in my hair or thrust into my waistcoat . . ."

"You *are* an ass!" remarked Bill, yawning.

"Perhaps," conceded Wright pleasantly, "but it is a quality which keeps me much in demand."

"You will never," said Bill deliberately, "get very far in your work, old man. For one thing — you have too much money: for another, you take nothing seriously."

"How about yourself?" asked Wright, a little stirred.

Bill glanced at Mercedes, but she smiled at him and nodded.

"I have found out about you, Billy," she said, "So go ahead and talk."

"Who told you?" demanded my husband, not very angrily.

"Partly Wright — I wormed it out of him, after he had let something slip — and, more recently, Mavis."

"Mavis!" said Bill in astonishment.

I did not meet his eyes.

"Why not?" asked Mercedes. "She is bursting with pride in you, naturally. *Cela va sans dire!* So, after I had probed and begged a little, she let me see the book. It is very wonderful," she ended, with that utter lack of self-consciousness in expressing her emotions and opinions, which, after one was used to it, was rather endearing.

"Well, then, as you're among friends, Billy, I repeat, what about yourself?"

"I have my profession," Bill answered quietly. "I am a doctor — and I love it. It is, perhaps, my vocation — to heal and to mend, and to help. And equally, perhaps, poetry is my avocation."

"Dictionary definition of avocation is 'diversion,'" said Wright, triumphantly.

"And the definition of diversion is 'recreation'!" I put in.

"Exactly," said Bill, "re-creation. To create anew — to refresh. That is, perhaps, the mission of poetry, and applies to the poet as well as to his audience. Poetry is, for me, the language of dreams: the ceaseless search for beauty: something common to all men. For the peasant dreams as well as the inventor: the man of science,

as well as the financier and the college professor who thinks of education as something bigger than is contained between the covers of a text-book. And from the soil, the shop, the laboratory, the office and the school-room great songs have been sung,— not all of them in words!"

"The financier dreams?" said Wright, incredulously. "Not much!"

"If he didn't, he wouldn't be where he is," answered Bill. "If the engineer didn't dream, the bridges would not be swung over the boiling rivers of strange countries, or the railroad tracks laid through the virgin jungle and the ageless desert —"

I had a curious sensation, listening to that even, low voice. It was as if, for the first time, I had heard Richard Warren speak.

"I guess you're right," said the other man, after a moment of silence.

"Of course I am," answered Bill. "And so, the poets dream dreams too, and try to interpret other men's dreams: those which are built in brick and stone: materialized into steel: founded in a huge office building. The grim reality of war stands for dreams sometimes. Many inarticulate poets have gone singing to the bayonet thrust. Once, a handful of people dreamed of Liberty; and the United States was their expression of that dream."

Someone drew a deep breath. It was I, perhaps.

Bill looked over at me, shaking the ash from his cigarette. And for a moment I forgot the feud between us: forgot that we were very soon to go our separate ways: forgot a number of things that I had known and I remembered only the songs that Richard Warren had sung for the world.

"It was a dream, too," said Mercedes, "which made Cuba free!"

We were grave, as, together, we four had never been through the sunny, idle days. I had the oddest feeling that between us all lay something unspoken, unnamed, intangible, as if, too, for the moment, we were closely knit together, completely *en rapport*.

"Well," said Wright easily, swinging the conversation back to its starting place, "It's all very well to talk. And perhaps you are more serious than I, Bill. Mind, I don't altogether admit it — but you tune your lyre to a deeper key than I do mine. I can't claim to be a poet: a versifier, yes. . . ."

"You do yourself an injustice," I said warmly, for Wright's somewhat exotic pen-name had long since come into my knowledge and I had seen some of his magazine verse.

"You've a gift," said my husband, "not lightly to be disregarded. But you're too versatile — you paint better than you write, and there's a lot in the old parable of the talents. And, by George, you've no honest right to your talent if, in some way, you do not use it for the good of your fellow-men."

"That's what I tell him," broke in Mercedes, in a little earnest note, and blushed a rosy red.

The links were almost deserted, and the tea-hour long past. Realizing that it would be late before we reached home, I rose, reluctantly. For there had been a spirit around the table which could not easily be recaptured — and I regretted its passing.

"The tourists have practically all left," said Mercedes, on the way to the car. "Very few are here still. And the residents have already begun to go North."

"You'll practise again this year?" asked Wright of Bill, as the car drove off, and I heard my husband answer,

"That depends very much on Mavis."

"Is he to poetize or administer pills?" asked Wright, turning to me.

"Both, I hope," I answered casually. "Good doctors may not be as rare as good poets, but the combination is remarkable."

"I should think," said Mercedes, with candour, "that you would be awfully jealous. . . ."

"Grateful lady patients?" asked Wright.

She nodded.

"I've not had the opportunity yet," I answered. "Since I've known him Bill hasn't had many patients except me —"

"Quite a serious case," remarked Wright solemnly, "one that demands incessant medical attention."

Bill laughed.

"If Mavis can stand for irregular hours and cold meals," he said, "I'll start in again when our vacation is over."

"You needn't rub it into me that I don't have to work for a living," said Wright. "Look at you, taking a year off, careless-like. 'Tisn't decent — for a doctor. I can't help it that my late lamented uncle made tin-pans successfully — and that I was his only living relative. He didn't approve of me at all," he concluded modestly, "and he thought my verses immoral, but he couldn't leave it all to charity, you know —"

"I've never lacked having more money than I needed," said Bill, as we drove through the hot, quiet night, "but I've been glad of it. If it didn't provide me with an

added incentive to work, it at least allowed me to do a good deal that I otherwise could not have done."

"The Denton Free Clinic, for instance," said Wright. But Bill did not answer.

For just a second I was hurt that he hadn't told me. And then I remembered how little I knew about the man who was my husband.

Mercedes, in the front seat with Bill, asked him a question. Under the cover of their voices Wright said to me,

"I shouldn't chaff Bill like that. I don't suppose that there is another medico of his age in New York who has done so much charity-doctoring. There are districts where the people have absolutely canonized him."

"He never tells me about that side of it," I said.

"I don't suppose he would," answered Wright. "You get to know these things by chance. But he had a streak in him — even at Princeton — that made him different from the rest of us. And men who were with him at Johns Hopkins could tell you tales —"

"Bridge tonight?" said Mercedes.

I jumped. My thoughts had been very far away, filling in gaps.

"You'll have to play with me," said Wright. "I understand all your signals, Mercedes!"

"But you don't profit by them," she answered, as we came within sight of the house.

I played a wretched game that evening. I couldn't keep my mind on the cards. It was off — back at the Country Club again, listening to a poet talk of poets: it was wondering a little about the "Denton Free Clinic": and, in consequence, I revoked twice, to the extreme amusement of our opponents.

"Haven't come to the point where you swear at your wife at the bridge-table, have you Bill?" asked Wright, as he carefully took the penalty.

"No," replied my husband, "that's a form of indoor sport I could never quite understand. It doesn't seem fair — for she couldn't swear back."

"Oh, couldn't I?" said I with ardour.

"I shan't give you the opportunity," he answered. "And now, if you please, one no trump."

The game broke up rather early. I was tired and wanted to go to bed. Wright and Mercedes, with the excuse that they were keenly interested in astronomy, walked out on the verandah. I told them good-night.

"You'll stay to chaperone the Irresponsibles?" I asked my husband.

"Gladly," he said, "and discreetly — from a distance."

There was something so comfortable and lovable about him that night that I suddenly wanted to tell him I was sorry that we had quarrelled, sorry that the barrier had arisen between us. But I couldn't. In one way, however, I might make amends. I said,

"I've grown awfully fond of Mercedes. I hope she will come North sometime — for the summer, perhaps. I think I misjudged her cruelly for a while."

The steel-blue eyes grew warm.

"She's a very nice child," said Bill, "and I knew you'd find it out before long. You didn't give her a chance at first. But I'm glad you like her, Mavis, for you can do her a lot of good."

"How?" I asked curiously.

"Well, for one thing, you're pretty well balanced — most of the time. And for another, you have had the advantage of a unique and splendid upbringing. And for

another, you are — unless given certain circumstances — most uncommonly sweet."

He said it in a very matter-of-fact tone: and looked at his watch as he spoke — not at me. I was absurdly embarrassed.

"Are — are you a 'certain circumstance'?" I asked daringly, and escaped to my room before he could answer. I heard him start to follow me, but apparently he thought better of it. But long after I was in bed, I heard a foot-fall under my windows, the smell of a pipe drifted in through the flower-scent, and the sound of a baritone voice singing softly,

"Who is Sylvia — who is she —?"

"Is she kind as she is fair —?"

I lay for some time, listening, and finally, as the footsteps turned away and the song grew fainter, I laid my hot cheek to the pillow and slept, dreamlessly, until morning.

But when morning came, it all seemed very far away — that talk at the Country Club — and the steps below my window. Wright was in his silliest mood, and Mercedes and he kept up a running fire of foolishness. Bill was preoccupied, almost abrupt. He left us directly after lunch, on one of his now daily visits to the Crowell plantation. And Mercedes disappeared with Wright at the same time. Where they were, I do not know to this day.

I had tea alone: Peter was with Sarah, and after tea I went out restlessly and walked, stopping at old Manuel's and at Annunciata's. It was growing dark before I turned homewards again, and there was a strange lingering light in the sky which drew my attention. A great, sulphur-colored cloud, murky and ominous, not like any

cloud I had ever seen. I hurried on and had reached the gates before the wind came. A rush, a tearing at trees and bushes, a tremendous sweep of hot, choking dust and air. I could hardly keep my feet, and struggled, step by step, head down, almost defenceless in the face of the storm. The wind had risen, apparently, without warning. And yet, looking back on it afterwards, I realized that, had I been a little more familiar with the vagaries of Cuban climate, I would have noticed the curious hush, the absolute stillness, expectant and breathless, which lay over Guayabal just before the storm broke. Nearing the house, I heard a tremendous crash, voices, and the sound of hurrying foot-steps. The wind was increasing in volume, and I fairly stumbled up the steps, almost falling. When my hand was finally on the door, it was wrenched open with violence, and I saw Bill on the threshold, very white, with burning blue eyes.

He caught me by the arm and pulled me into the room.

"Where have you been?" he said, furiously.

"Walking," said I, the ruins of my hat in my hand.

He made a sound in his throat, half-anger, half-impotence.

"The roof of the garage has blown off," he said. "It's a nice little storm. I have been looking for you all over the plantation. No one had any idea where you were. I found Wright and sent Mercedes in the house — she's had rather a narrow escape — from a falling tree. She's all right, but hysterical —"

"I must go to her at once," I said, starting off.

The long arm shot out and I was pulled close to the tall, lean figure.

"Just a minute," said Bill. "Mercedes is all right,

as I said. Sarah is with her. But I want to ask you this . . . quite aside from the danger you ran, in a wind like this, why did you disobey my express wishes and go out — alone — away from the house?"

Then I remembered.

"I —" said I, and was silent.

Bill dropped my arm.

"I suppose," he said with bitterness, "it was because I asked you not to. Very well, I've learned my lesson. You knew that Guayabal is in a very unsettled state: you knew that Crowell had had trouble on his plantation: I told you there had been threats — demonstrations. I asked you not to run any risks. That is why, I suppose, when the opportunity arose, you deliberately ignored my wishes."

"You are very unjust," I said, fighting back the tears.

"I hope so," said Bill quietly, "but I'm afraid not. It seems as if we couldn't have a whole day of peace and friendliness under the same roof. I've tried my best, Mavis, to be as little in your way as possible — to make the best of a trying situation. But at every turn you manage to antagonize me and to rebel against me. I might have known —"

He turned away and lighted a cigarette with fingers which shook.

"I'm sorry," I said, steadying my voice with an effort, "if I have annoyed you. I did not go out this afternoon with such intention."

I would have stopped there, but the lift of his shoulders angered me until I finally lost all control of myself.

"I'll not be a burden to you long," I said. "As soon as we are home again I will release you from your responsibilities. I have wanted to spare Father, but I see

that I can't — you go too far. I don't know how such things are done, but it shouldn't be very difficult to obtain an annulment of our marriage. The whole thing has been a ghastly mistake . . . an impulse I have regretted ever since. But it's not too late," I said, with my head held very high, "to rectify that mistake."

I walked past him into my own room. Somehow the pride that had always come to my rescue was missing now. I was just hurt — hurt, and unhappy and very lonely. To speak to me so! To look at me so, out of those steel-blue eyes! It was not just; it was not anything but deliberate cruelty!

Once having said that I would make myself free, the thing crystalized for me as it had never done before. Of course, I had meant all along to separate from my temporary husband. That was understood at the outset. But it had seemed a long way off, indefinitely vague. And now that my decision was spoken, it loomed very near. Irrevocable. I shrank, in anticipation, from the publicity of it, the questions, the prying eyes. Wright would wonder and grieve — and Mercedes — and I? I hardly knew. On Father's sorrow and self-reproach I dared not dwell. Now I had nothing left.

I rose and bathed my eyes. They were swollen from crying and my throat ached abominably. And then, with a tremendous effort, I opened my door and went out to find Mercedes.

She was in her room, shaken but quite recovered, and full of gratitude to Wright for seeing her danger and pulling her away just in time.

"Where were you?" she asked anxiously. "You weren't hurt, were you? You look dreadfully, Mavis!"

Hurt? Yes, I was hurt beyond healing. But Mercedes must not know.

"I was in no danger," I said, evasively. "I came in just as the storm was beginning."

"You heard the roof go then?" she asked. "Wasn't it awful? It is a wonder Bill wasn't killed — he was just driving the car in. . . ."

"Bill?" I said, stupidly.

"What's the matter? Didn't he tell you? You're white as a sheet!"

She jumped up from the bed and put her arms about me.

"Mavis, are you faint? Let me call Bill!"

"Please don't," I said. "I'm all right now."

The dreadful dizziness had passed: my ears stopped singing and the room assumed its normal aspect again.

"If you don't mind," I said, "I'll lie down beside you for a bit. Please don't tell anyone. I'm nervous, I suppose, and upset."

And so, it was in Mercedes Howells' arms that I finally cried myself into calmness. And Mercedes, suddenly tender and very gentle, never asked why, and, bless her heart, never told.

CHAPTER XVIII

A day or so went by, devoid of any particular incident. If Bill and I spoke to each other at all, it was to discuss our plans for leaving Cuba. The Goodriches were returning shortly from Europe: Father sent a homesick-for-me cable from Green Hill: the weather was beginning to grow very warm: in short, a hundred and one things warned us that the Spring were better spent in the North. We fixed our departure for a day not two weeks distant, and Bill went into Havana to book our passage. Even in public we had dropped the pretence of marital banter. But Wright and Mercedes, apparently absorbed in each other, did not notice: or, if they did, kept each his and her own counsel, as far as I knew.

The lazy, sun-steeped days seemed interminable. I had, luckily, a number of things to arrange — another trunk to buy and some sewing to accomplish, with Annunciata's help. And Bill's obvious preoccupation could easily have been laid to the growing unrest in Guayabal. Mr. Crowell, an anxious, nervous, but charming person, had been more than once at "The Palms" to discuss the situation. If it had not been for my husband's sense of responsibility towards the Reynolds, I think that we should have packed up and left Cuba in short order. But he was anxious to stay on for a time longer and see Silas, and what men were loyal to their American employer, through what he hoped would prove a passing phase of revolt — or so he said.

As for me, I went through the days, weighted under a burden of uncertainty and a sorrow without name. Father's miniature, lying open on my night-table, seemed to reproach me: seemed, too, at times, to reproach himself, which was even harder to bear. "I have done my human best for you," the gentle-strong mouth seemed to say. "I have never wanted anything but your happiness, my little Mavis." And the kind, humorous eyes added, "Is it my fault that I must hear you sobbing through these long, unhappy nights?"

No, not his fault. Whose, then? I dared not ask the picture in the little leather case, for I was afraid it might answer.

"It is *his* fault, Father," I would defend myself mutely. "We might have been content, even happy, in a friendly way, if it had not been for him."

"It was not for Friendship alone that I gave you to him, Daughter," the answer would come, "but for something dearer, bigger, deeper. You were so young and so alien from the world. I had thought that the man to whom we both owe everything would be the one to help you through all that first difficult time: to teach you, finally, Life's loveliest lesson. And I had hoped, prayed even, that you would one day come to be to him what your Mother was to me. . . . There was not much time," the beloved voice went on, very sadly, "for me to make a decision. It was hard to feel I might have to leave you . . . alone . . . unsheltered. . . . How hard, you will never know . . . unless some day you are called upon to leave a child of your own. . . ."

"Father!" I begged —"Please —"

"If the mistake was mine," said the voice which still seemed to come from that unsmiling miniature, "I can

only ask your forgiveness, Mavis. Even your Father, who loves you beyond all earthly things, was wrong to try and shape your destiny."

"No — no —" I sobbed.

I laid the minature on the table again. The voice in my heart had ceased to speak: There were only the pictured eyes, looking into mine from a little leather case. But for a long time, Father had talked to me so. I read between the lines of his letters and prayed that he should not read between the lying phrases of mine. Was it all lies? "I am happy," I told him again and again: and he, who knew me so well, was convinced, perhaps because, in a certain, curious sense, that much was true.

Underneath bewilderment, misunderstanding, the pin-pricks of pride, and the smart of old resentments, I *had* been happy. It was as if I walked on a strange, new road, toward some unknown goal, some unguessed shelter. There were turnings in the path: dark places: uneven stretches: but always a bird sang, sweetly, in the distance,— the sun cleared the clouds and Adventure waited for me just around the corner. But lately, the ground had fallen away from under my very feet, and left me standing at the edge of an abyss, looking across a chasm of despair, to the far country I would never reach. . . .

Mercedes knocked at my door, and came in.

"You've been away so long," she said, reproachfully. "Wright is going to mass with me, in the Church at Ceube. Won't you come too, Mavis?"

It's Sunday then, I thought, wondering how the days had passed, nameless and unheeded by me — every one bringing me nearer —

"Sure you want me?" I asked, and at her assurance,

I got my hat and set out with her and Wright in the car.

Bill drove us down: he didn't come in, but went about other business after he had left us at the little church, solidly built of time and weather stained adobe, red-roofed, and squatly towered.

The small room was filled with people. We squeezed into an already overcrowded pew, and kneeling, I was almost drugged with the clouds of incense, and the hot, close air.

At the altar, the red-robed priest, very old and frail, intoned the ceremonial service. A full-grown altar-"boy," black as his robes, and slippered, swung the heavy censer, and looked over the audience for possible disturbances. They occurred more than once. The brown babies cooed or cried, according to their several temperaments; a mongrel dog ran in and out of the pews, at a late-comer's heels; and here and there, a black-eyed girl looked over her shoulder at some responsive cavalier who stood or knelt with the many worshippers lining the walls.

There was an amazing, almost tangible spirit in the place: a mingling of childlike devotion and equally childlike theatricalism. The people came to the service, like children to a parent, wholly natural, wholly simple, and yet not wholly devoid of a certain dramatic instinct and, above all, keenly sensitive to the sweet-scented vapor, the well-worn lace and vestments of the priest, the solemn intonation of the Mass.

Bright-winged birds flew astonishingly in and out of the open-shuttered windows: the consumptive organ wheezed and muttered: the voices of the people rose with a grave eagerness upon the heavy air. And here and there an adventurous ray of sunshine fell alike on old and young heads, lingered on the gay colors of the girls'

dresses, slid like a finger of gold over the red-robed priest at the little altar, and danced across the heavy, smoky rafters of the ceiling.

Mercedes, her lovely face hidden, told her silver and pearl rosary. Wright, after his first moment of embarrassment and instinctive recoil from so much massed humanity, was engrossed in her, in his surroundings. I imagined I saw a picture shaping — a little more tender, a little more serious than anything he had done yet. And I, kneeling in the stuffy chapel with an alien people of a different expression of Faith, felt for the first time in many, many hours, a sense of release, of peace, a cooling touch on my hot and aching heart.

Mass over, the people poured, laughing, talking, gesticulating out into the thick, yellow sunshine. The half-flirtations which had deflected the thoughts of some of the younger worshippers, were renewed and pursued. A young mother sat on the steps of the church and bared her brown breast to her baby's fumbling lips. She looked a deep-eyed Madonna, as she sat there, unconscious of the people around her, a white mantilla framing her face. Her husband, a clean-featured man, taller than the average Cuban, stood behind her, smoking, his coarse white trousers dazzling in the sunshine, his bright purple "American" shirt worn like a smock, after the "dress" regulations of Guayabal on Sunday.

Bill drove up presently, and as usual, the straggling children clustered around the car. He was always dear with children — white or black, brown or yellow. They were instantly his friends.

Wiggles, riding proudly in the front seat, created quite a sensation, and Mercedes, climbing in to hold him in her

pretty, primrose-dimity lap, had great difficulty in restraining him.

"Where is his collar, Mavis?" she asked, clutching the frantic dog to her demure, white frills.

"He was uncomfortable with it, in the heat," I answered. "Weren't you, Wigglesworth? So I took it off —"

The car gave a sudden leap — and I knew that Bill had been listening for my answer; knew that he knew that I could not throw innocent Wiggles away, but that, when the mask had fallen from Richard Warren, I had, in a fit of anger, taken away the too-significant collar. It was in my trunk — but sometimes I wondered what had happened to my lucky charm of cool, green jade — flung from my window in a moment of pure rage.

Once, I had looked for it — the day after Mercedes and I had siesta-ed in the palm-grove — not since.

When we had arrived home, Wright drew me mysteriously aside.

"Let me see those last two poems of yours again, will you, Mavis?" he said. "One of the men I was at college with wants me to go in with him on a book-shop and publishing venture — you know, odd books, quaintly bound, and all that sort of thing. He has his eye on a place in Greenwich Village, and just the right, short-haired, but delusively shrewd girl to run it — the shop end, I mean."

"What do you want the verses for?" I asked suspiciously.

Wright grinned.

"If I am to be the Angel in this affair," he said, "how could I employ celestial qualities better than to boost my friends — and incidentally, myself? We can collect your

poems, publish them in a sufficiently bizarre edition to attract attention — and, without letting Mr. John Denton's solid and conservative firm into the secret — you can astonish your husband, by Christmas, say, with a book of your own."

"But," I argued, "they're not good enough —"

"They're good enough for me," said Wright magnificently, "and it will be rather fun, having a business of this sort to play with. It's one way of revenging myself on those beastly tin-pans."

I grew just a little excited, picturing Bill's astonishment. And I would not be there to hear his criticism. I had a dozen verses or more which Wright had not yet seen: the best, I thought, of all. And, of the poems I had styled "Cuban Pastels," the two he had just spoken of headed the group.

I

HAVANA HARBOR

Hued as a peacock's plumage, wide unfurled,
The sea dreams, smiling. Far off, toylike, frail
A boat drifts to the blue edge of the world,
The brilliant sunlight glinting from it's sail.
An idle cruiser, sinister and grey,
Drifts, out of tune with sunlight and with dreams,
While, on the city-wall, the rainbow-spray
Scatters to crystal, shot with opal gleams.
The shore curves tender as a clasping arm —
Like cardboard structures from a clever hand,
Bright in the sun, and touched with old-world charm,
Unreal, the ragged lines of houses stand.
Dim with the Past, a fortress close-guards yet
A city whose once-fettered feet are free,
To wear, serene as some white-limbed coquette,
The gold-and-sapphire anklet of the Sea.

2

MORRO CASTLE

An old fortress, wrapped in magic sleep,
The city's crouching watchdog, fronts the sea,
And locks stone lips on tales of dungeon-keep;
On legends of dead terrors, buried deep;
And gives no hint of once-screamed, strangled plea,
Choked to swift silence in the torture cell,
In ages dark with bloody sweat of pain. . . .
Ah! if the Morro ghosts could walk again,
What whispered horror could those bruised throats tell,
Wrung by the cruel, long hands of Ancient Spain!

I gave the verses to Wright, after luncheon,— all of them. He could do with them as he liked, I said. Revise, correct, re-group. I was tired of singing songs, but I did not tell him that. In my heart I thought I would be glad to have my verses, bound and shut in a little book. They would remind me of Cuba, and of other things, when I was too old, too armoured by time, to feel the hurt of remembering. I would keep my Diary, too, against that distant day. Time, I had read, heals all. It was pleasant to think that sometime the ache in my breast would be stilled. But I thought perhaps I would miss it, it would grow to be part of me after a while —

Mercedes, looking in on me from the flowers screening the verandah where I sat, asked coaxingly,

"Coming walking with us, Mavis!"

"Us?" I inquired.

"Wright, and Billy, and me."

I shook my hand.

"I think not," I answered. "I have some letters to write."

"Billy said you wouldn't come," said she, pouting.

"Did he?"

For a moment I was inclined to reconsider, but the delight of proving my husband wrong would not have atoned for an hour of his society. And well I knew that Wright and Mercedes would, eventually, wander off or get surprisingly lost, or accomplish one of the fifty odd things which they managed so ingenuously, and which would rid them of even the most friendly chaperonage.

Mercedes waited.

"Bill is right," I said, "as always. I think I'll not go, Mercedes, if you and Wright don't mind."

"Not at all," she said generously, "only," and here her voice grew wistful, "only the time is getting so short, Mavis. In two days I'll be going to Havana for the Mendez dance — and to stay. And then, before we know it, you will be going home again."

"But you're following shortly," I reminded her.

"With my family!" she added.

"Wont your Mother consider lending you to me for a while this summer?" I asked. "I shall be —" and almost I had said "so very lonely" before I thought. I stopped.

"Shall be what?" asked Mercedes, coming up the steps and dropping to my feet, on a crimson cushion.

"So very glad to see you," I answered, and truly.

"I wonder," said Mercedes.

"That's not very nice of you," I accused her.

"I didn't mean — what you said," she hastened to explain. "I only meant — I wonder if Wright would wait over and go up with us? It is so dull," she went on, "just travelling with the family, and Father likes him so much. What do you think, Mavis?"

Mavis thought that without Wright's pleasant, obtuse

presence, that homeward voyage would be a nightmare. But she did not say so.

"I'm sure he'd love to," I answered, smiling into the pretty, eager face, "especially if you ask him — very nicely."

Mercedes laid her flushed cheek for a minute against my knees. Through the thin fabric of my gown I could feel the warmth of it.

"You like Wright, don't you?" she asked, a little anxiously. "And he's Billy's best friend —?"

I put my hand on her smooth, heavy hair. A scent, as of youth and flowers and sunshine came to me from the polished coils of it. Wright was a very fortunate young person.

"I'm very fond of him, Silly," said I, "and Bill adores him. There, is that recommendation enough?"

She jumped up, in a whirl of skirts, and kissed me impetuously: held me a moment in the clasp of her strong, young arms, and then, her high heels clicking on the tiles, ran into the house.

"More than enough," she called over her shoulder.

But when, charmingly hatted, dragging the point of a butterfly sunshade after her, she went down the path between Bill and Wright, there was no sign of her recent agitation on that smooth, creamy cheek.

Left alone, I sighed a little, and looked ahead. They had fallen in love so wholeheartedly, so gaily, those two. I pictured them, if all went well, going through life like the Princess and Prince in the fairy-tale, living "happily forever after." She could love, I knew, that feather-brained, big-hearted little friend of mine. She was young, too, younger than her years, an astonishing thing in Southern women. She would be easily assimilated,

would adapt herself gracefully. And it was patent that she thought Wright head and shoulders above the average cut of men. She had told me so, without knowing it, over and over again. And Wright, diffident, sensitive Wright, under his absurdities and his worldly airs? He would cherish her, I knew, and be good to her all his life: invest her with a never-failing glamour, make her his model and his sovereign lady: write madrigals about her: worship at her tiny feet. It was a very pretty little Romance. . . .

They would never have pain in their love, I thought: never know undreamed of depths of agony and self-knowledge: never know secret shrines despoiled, the altars overthrown, desecrated. . . .

I heard Peter's voice in the living room, and Sarah's asking where I was. I called to them and went in.

It was strange, I thought, as I discussed with Sarah the preliminaries of packing, how much I seemed to know about Love. I, who had never known, nor felt any save my Father's and that of my few, placid friends . . . and perhaps that Love that is all dream-stuff. And in my heart was a voice which questioned and which I dared not answer. "How do you *know?*" it said to me. "*How do you know?*"

I closed my ears to it and drew Peter into my lap.

"Will you be glad to go home?" I asked him.

"Well," said Peter, considering, "there's — Silas."

"So there is," I assented.

"Couldn't he come with us?" asked Peter, coaxingly. "He could sleep in my room —"

I looked at Sarah, for appreciation of this. Lean, long Silas lodging in Peter's small nest. And I looked twice. Sarah, her head bent over an armful of my gowns, was —

blushing! I couldn't believe my eyes. I might have fancied the Rock of Gibraltar moved to such soft symptoms of complexion, before Sarah.

"Why, Sarah!" I said, in amazement.

The difficult red crept up to her honest eyes. She raised them and met mine, and what I saw there was very beautiful.

I put Peter off my lap.

"Run out and play for a while, dear," I said, "before tea."

And then,

"Sarah?"

"He's a good man, Miss Mavis," she answered, clutching the gowns to her, ruinously — my careful Sarah! "And we're neither of us so young, nor so flighty that we wouldn't know our own minds. Mr. Reynolds has written him that he has a buyer for the place, and we thought that when things was settled down here, Silas could come up North to Green Hill — and —"

"But, Sarah," I cried out, in childish dismay, "I can't lose you — I can't —"

She put the gowns on a nearby chair and touched my hair with her faithful old hand.

"Indeed, Miss Mavis," she said earnestly, "not for a hundred Silases would I leave you. But Silas spoke to the Doctor about a place — and the Doctor said he needed a man to drive for him, and so, if you want us, we could both stay on. No one could take care of you," she said, jealously, "except me."

"Does the Doctor know — about you?" I asked.

"Silas didn't tell him — and I was going to wait until we got home. It come all at once," she explained, "but Silas thinks maybe he's guessed —"

And I had been so blind — so blind to the times when Sarah walked out with Silas, for "a breath of air": so blind to the long silences in the kitchen of an evening, under Norah's cordial, Irish eyes.

"It's wonderful!" I said, at last. "Silas is a lucky man. I'm awfully happy for you, Sarah."

"You ain't angry?" she asked timidly. "You don't think it's foolishness — at my age?"

"I think it's beautiful," I said, and as she turned to go, I put out a hand to draw her near, to kiss her. The only mother I had ever known, faithful, self-sacrificing, tender — I was glad that her old age would be sheltered and made happy for her.

After she had gone, I sat for a long time in silence. The voices of the others, their steps on the path, aroused me. And, as I went out obediently to Wright's hail, I thought of Mercedes — and now Sarah — each with her love-story and her pride: the enchanting, spoiled young daughter of America and Spain with her poet, and the elderly woman, austere as her own New England, her shoulders bent in my service, with a good man of her own kind —. Well, Father was left to me, thank God — but —

I felt terribly lonely.

CHAPTER XIX

The morning the Howells' car came to take Mercedes and Wright to Havana and the Mendez dance, Mrs. Howells came with it. She would not wait for luncheon, but had a little talk with me while Mercedes, in a flutter, was collecting her things. It was a very little talk, and consisted mostly in shruggings of the maternal shoulders, lifting of the placid, maternal brows, and half-finished phrases, unspoken questions. And she left, indolently satisfied. The tin-pans had won her. I foresaw a cloudless sky of courtship for Wright, as far as his Mercedes' mother was concerned.

Mercedes, promising to "return" Wright on the morrow, was reluctant to go.

"I've been so happy here," she whispered, as she kissed me good-by. "You'll never know how happy. And I'm so grateful, Mavis!"

She kissed Bill, too, when her mother's back was turned, the merest ghost of a caress, brushing his cheek, accompanied by a little giggle of pure mischief. And he patted her slim shoulders with a tolerant hand, as he bade her "run along and enjoy her party."

"My aunt!" said Wright to me, tragically, "couldn't you persuade the old lady to sit in the front seat with that brigand in a general's uniform who is driving the car?"

I waved them farewell with a sinking at my heart. It was as if Youth and Gaiety were leaving me, hand in hand, with never a backward glance.

I did not see Bill again until luncheon an hour later. It was one of our old-time silent meals, although we talked in a desultory manner, while the slippered servitors were in the room. Bill passed me salt after the manner of an ancient monarch handing poison — with deadly courtesy. I responded with pepper. And after Wing and Fong had left us, at the end of the meal, I tried desperately to make small talk.

"I miss Mercedes so much," I said, "and Wright too."

No answer.

"It looks like a match," said I presently.

"It does," said Bill, gloomily.

I waited.

"Wright's crazy about her," proffered my husband, after a time, leaning back in his chair.

"Did he tell you so?" I asked curiously.

"Kept me up one whole night, expatiating on her charms and his extreme unworthiness," he replied.

I laughed.

"When I think of the things he said about her at first: 'female leopardess,' and 'did you take him for a lion tamer?'" I said, "it really is funny."

"A little antagonism at the outset," said Bill, blowing neat rings, "is very good for the course of true love — sometimes."

I was silent.

"Of course," said Bill, positively growling, "it's a lottery anyway —"

He was so absurd, so little-boyish, so ill-tempered, that I wanted to mother him. I had seen Peterkins just like that when things went wrong.— After all, I thought, it must be trying to be even temporarily bound to a woman you dislike so much.

"Speaking of lotteries," I said lightly, "you haven't heard the results of the last drawing, have you?"

"No," he answered, "but Silas is counting the hours until the afternoon when the papers come up — he bought half a dozen tickets from that chap who rode up here the other day —"

He rose from his chair and called the garage on the phone. By a miracle, Silas was there, and I heard Bill ask him the number of his tickets. Then, jotting them down, he called Havana and some mysterious person and asked for the winning numbers.

As he spoke in rapid Spanish, I was forced to wait until he turned from the phone to say, "By George, Silas has made a killing!"

I jumped up and was at his elbow when he put the receiver down.

"Oh what is it?" I asked, fairly dancing with excitement.

"Not the big prize," he answered, "but $1500 for all of that —"

"Sarah will die of joy," I began.

"So it's true then," said Bill, interrupting.

"True as true," I answered, "and I think it's splendid."

"I thought there was something afoot," said Bill, "when Silas asked for a job with me. I was glad to give him one. He can be useful to me in a hundred ways. He's a corker —"

"They could build a little house — at the back of the garden. Father would be so pleased —" I said, eagerly. "Sarah wouldn't leave me, you know —"

I stopped.

Bill, with his hat in his hands, turned.

"It will be difficult to arrange that," he said, "as you have made other plans. And I shall leave Green Hill — so I am afraid," he concluded evenly, "that a 'little house in the garden'— unless *you* wish to keep Silas on — wouldn't be quite feasible."

He went out with that, and it was some time before I had pulled myself together and gone in to tell Sarah the news. I saw her later, flying in a most indecorous manner toward the garage, and knew that she and Silas would presently be sitting on the step of the car building air-castles in Green Hill with their new fortune. Well I knew that one of them would be reared in the back of my little garden, just as I thoughtless enough, had one. It wouldn't be fair to hurt Sarah now, I told myself. I would wait till we were home. Sarah would be sorry — she liked Bill — but Father would keep both Sarah and Silas on — the place needed a permanent man-of-all-work. . . .

But there were breakers ahead — bitter waters. I was to be spared nothing — nothing — to the final humiliation.

There was a letter from Father when the mail came in. It isn't necessary to set it down here. Suffice it to say that something I had said in my last letter about his never-failing generosity to me, had called forth a denial that "the bit of pin-money — to make you feel independent, dear!" amounted to anything. And then a word about the income Bill had settled on me: "I think you should know, Mavis," he concluded, "although I am breaking word with Bill. He told me he didn't want your small, unworldly head to be bothered with money matters. But it is time that you learned to be practical —"

He mentioned the little allowance he had insisted on

making me: it would hardly have paid for my shoes. And eventually it was clear to me that the money in the bank . . . my clothes . . . my lovingly purchased gifts for my friends . . . Sarah's wages . . . my many extravagances since coming to Cuba . . . everything, everything had come from the one source . . . Bill. And I, more ignorant than any child about the value of money, had not even asked, except once. And then he had lied to me, had told me it was my money, my Father's money, and all the time I had been living on charity. How well he knew me, that he took the chance that I would not ask Father for a definite statement of what allowance he was making me!

I was overwhelmed with shame and dismay. It seemed as if this were the proverbial last straw. "They make gold out of straws, don't they?" my sick brain inquired childishly. It was hard to think coherently.

I went to the telephone and called the garage. Silas answered. I managed, somehow, to congratulate him on the lottery drawing before I asked him to find Dr. Denton, please, and ask him to come up to the house, if he were not too busy. I wished to speak to him.

Ten full, wretched minutes I endured before he came.

"Is anything the matter?" he asked, bursting in precipitately.

Mutely, I gave him the letter.

He read it, and crumpled the sheets in his hand.

Instantly on the defensive,

"Well?" he said.

"Was there any reason to lie to me?" I counter-questioned, quietly. "You must have known that, sooner or later, I would know . . . if not now, then when I saw Father again."

I think my eyes warned him that this was a time for very plain speaking.

"I had hoped," he answered, after a little pause, "to persuade your Father to bear me out in what I believed a harmless enough conspiracy.— After all," he added, breaking my persistent silence, "it would be difficult to explain to your Father that you refused to let me support you."

"I am sorry," I said, rather more gently than I felt, "to have been more of a burden on you than I knew. Had I known, had I for one instant dreamed that I would be dependent on you, I would never have consented to this arrangement. This may sound very foolish, I know, and I see now how impossible it all would have been,— but this is how I felt, and you, I think, knew."

He nodded, eyes on mine.

"Yes," said he.

"You have had a very pretty revenge," I told him, each word dropping like a cold, little stone into the hush of the big room. "You must have laughed, often, to yourself. No doubt it has been very amusing, waiting for the bubble to break. If you will make me out a statement, as nearly as you can, of just how much I am indebted to you, I will try to repay you little by little."

I felt the absurdity of the situation, the utter arrogance and futility of my words as I spoke them. But I had to speak.

"Please —" he flung out a protesting hand, "why do you fret yourself with trifles? Are you not willing to make some further sacrifice for your Father? When the time comes for us to separate, I had hoped — after all,

it would be only the usual thing to do — to make you an allowance."

"Did you intend to consult me about it?" I asked, furiously.

He hesitated.

"Please answer," I said.

At my tone, he raised his eyebrows ever so slightly.

"I am waiting," I announced, with dangerous patience.

"Well — I admit the situation seemed difficult, but it was in the future," he answered finally, "and I thought, perhaps —"

"Never mind. You would have gone out of my life with the amusing knowledge that you had a hold on me, to a certain extent? It was well planned," I said, growing colder and colder minute by minute, until in the sunny warmth of the windows I shivered uncontrollably. "But you must have thought me even more of an imbecile than I am. I owe you," I ended, "a large sum of money. When we are separated, when Father gets used to that fact, and when he realizes how well I am, how strong, there will be some sort of work for me somewhere, I am sure, that will both occupy my time, and enable me to repay you."

"Work?" said Bill, and then, under his breath, "My God!"

He was angry, I knew — hurt, I felt. And I was glad.

"I am not a — charity patient, Dr. Denton!" I said, and left the room.

The rest of that day is a blank to me now. If I had suffered before, I suffered a thousand-fold now. I could not look at the miniature. I was even angry with Father — dearest Father, who had done his "human

best" for me. I hated myself, I hated life, I wanted to die. To be laughed at; to have had my little defiances and independences met with the secret thought "the very clothes on her back were bought with my money"; to have been fooled and fooled again, to his heart's content; to have lived on the bounty of a man who despised me, hurt and wounded me at every turn — it was unbearable.

When I was home again, when the tangle finally became unraveled, I would go to Uncle John. I would ask him frankly what to do; tell him the whole, bitter little story; ask him to find work for me — reading proof, correcting manuscript, scrubbing floors — I didn't care. There were business schools, I thought vaguely — and cursed the years of invalidism which had kept from me so much knowledge of the world, so unfitted me to cope with it, once I was on my material feet.

Father need never know. He would think it a whim, would be, I imagined, even a little proud, would believe, even, that I sought to distract myself after the wreck of my married life. Other women had done the same thing.

I thought of the city as I had seen it: the crowds and the loneliness and the bleakness of the streets: the hurrying, uncaring people — I had read of girls in the city; the indignities of the boarding house; the strain and the demand and the difficult way that lies before the untrained wage-earner —

Mavis of Green Hill in a New York office! I laughed aloud at the thought, and the sound of my own voice frightened me.

I couldn't cry. Somehow, I hadn't a tear left. I could only clench and unclench my hands on the lap of the little mauve gown which William Denton had

bought for me — I wondered if Mrs. Goodrich knew. It had been she who had attended to all my purchases before I left Green Hill, who had gone into town with my measurements and returned with two trunks full of everything I needed, and assured me that the "bill was taken care of."

What a fool I had been!

I did not go out to tea. Sarah brought me something in my room. I told her I had a headache. It was the truth. And through my closed door I could hear Bill's voice asking for me. Mr. Crowell was there; he had ridden over some time before. I sent my regrets and stayed in my room.

At dinner I hardly spoke. I was too conscious of the clothes I wore, the food I ate. The one burdened me, the other choked me.

Bil, which was unusual, talked nervously all through the meal, about everything and nothing. Even through the dull sense of impotence and anger that possessed me, I could see that he was ill-at-ease, excited, waiting for something — waiting, perhaps, for me to reopen the last painful chapter. He could wait, I thought.

We had just been served with salad, when Fong came in, brushed Wing aside, and bent over Bill, saying something very low.

A little gleam of some inner excitement came into the steel-blue eyes. He flung down his napkin.

"Tell Juan to wait," he said, and rose.

"I beg your pardon," he said formally to me, "but I am afraid that you must eat your dinner alone. Someone has come up from the village to see me."

"Juan?" I asked. "Is Annunciata ill again?"

"No, no," he was clearly impatient and started from the room.

"Shall I have Norah save some dinner for you?" I asked, mechanically.

"Don't bother," he said, hesitated, and then, suddenly crossing the room in four strides, he was beside me. I felt his hand on my hair and stiffened under the unaccustomed touch. The hand dropped to his side.

"Don't think so badly of me, Mavis," he said, "even if you have been a 'charity patient'— do you know the Bible meaning of Charity?"

Before I could speak, he was gone. He had not changed for dinner, a real innovation, and was in riding things. I heard the ring of the little spurs he wore on the tiles, and the sound of a closing door.

"The Bible meaning of Charity?" But that was — that was — Love. What did he mean — a love-patient?

I sat, my hands under my chin, while Wing came and went with the untasted food. A love-patient?

Something terribly sweet and keen pierced my heart. It couldn't be. Love wasn't like that — cruel and wounding and hurting. Love "suffereth long and is kind." That was in the Bible too. "Love suffereth long and is kind — seeketh not its own — beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth."

The big tears ran down my cheeks. "*Love never faileth.*"

If it was true then —"Oh, God, let it be true!" I prayed, mutely. If it were true then, how blind I had been! Sacrifice — patience — hope —. Would he have done so much for someone he despised — even for revenge? I began to remember —

There were voices outside — loud, excited, almost hysterical — Was Bill there? I waited for him in my chair. I had not moved. He would find me as he had left me. Perhaps he had come back to tell me what he had meant. Charity — Love.

The door flew open and Sarah burst in. She was crying. I saw that at once, and wanted to say to her,

"So you have heard? It isn't true, Sarah, it wasn't charity, after all, it was love —"

But she came straight to me and caught desperately at my hands,

"Miss Mavis,— the cane — it's been set afire — Silas is down there, and Dr. Denton —"

Then I awoke.

"Dr. Denton!" I had her by the shoulders, I was shaking her — "Not Dr. Denton!"

"Yes, Miss Mavis. Juan crept up here to warn him. But those devils fired the cane while he was in this very house. Fields of it in flame, and Silas there —"

She was in a chair now, her apron twisted between her work-worn fingers, the sobs taking her by the throat.

Funny that she could cry like that, I thought, watching her. I must give her something to make her stop — if Bill were here —

Bill! Bill!

I must have screamed. Sarah, her arms around me, was herself in a minute, had herself in hand.

"There, there," she said soothingly. "They'll be all right, I am sure. You're to be calm, Miss Mavis, and not take on so."

Calm! With the Far Country just within reach — and the fire sweeping across the cane-fields.

I put her away from me.

"Go to the kitchen, Sarah dear," I said very quietly, "and wait for news. Have Wing and Fong gone too?"

She nodded.

"I'll wait here," I said. "I had better get out the Doctor's kit and all the first-aid things. Someone may be burned —"

She sobbed at that, but turned and went to the kitchen.

I went into Bill's room.

For a minute I did nothing — only touched the things on his bureau — his brush, his comb —

A little snap-shot of me stood there. Of me, in a wheel-chair — I had forgotten that —

I opened a leather case which stood on the bureau, it had his initials on it, and a small key lay beside it. Opened it and saw my letters to Richard Warren. They were tossed together, as if he had been reading them. He had told me that he never kept letters.

Somehow, I found the first-aid things and the little emergency case. They were on the table by his bed. And then, taking them into the living-room, I called out to Sarah to find some linen and tear it into sheets — we had very little gauze in the house.

My hands on the first-aid kit, I sat down to think. It was too bad Wright was not here. He would not lose his head. But Mercedes would. I was glad she was in Havana. Suddenly I laughed to think of them, dancing at the Mendez ball —

Sarah came in, her hands full of an old sheet.

"Any news?" I asked, steadily.

"It's going fast," she said dully. "You can see it —"

I went to the window. The whole sky was crimson. I saw the smoke wreathing up through the flame, fancied that I heard shouts — strained my eyes for the sight of

a tall, lean figure. He would come soon, I knew, and tell me that it had been a nightmare, that he was safe, that he had been in no danger —

I looked around. Sarah had gone out, quietly. No one was there.

Softly I went across the room, opened the door, and slipped like a ghost into the menacing night.

I walked at first. Then ran. The plants and trees caught at my dress. They wanted to hold me back. I shook myself free and went on. Nearer and nearer. How much smoke there was! The whole last crop gone. Thousands of arrobas of sugar, gone in a breath! Good, loyal Juan, I thought, as I went on, stumbling, falling once to my knees. My dress was ruined. Bill will buy me another, I said aloud. Not Charity — Love.

Suddenly I was in the midst of it. The flame and the smoke, the hurrying figures, black with soot and sweat, digging the trenches that might save the cane.

"Bill!"

My own voice pierced through the smoke and crackle. I was going on. I would not stop until I had found him.

Was that Bill, blackened, a figure in a dream, his shirt burned away from one bare shoulder. There were red marks on his shoulder —

He didn't hear me? Didn't he want to? Was he angry? I was sorry I had been so foolish, but I hadn't known that he cared. Why hadn't he told me? Or had he tried to, and I wouldn't listen?

"Bill!"

A spark on my dress — a glare and a flame. I was part of the roaring and the smoke and the crimson glare about me, beating at the little, licking, red tongues with ineffectual hands.

Death then? But I wanted to live! It wasn't fair!

Bill!

His arms about me, his bare hands crushing out the flames, his agonized voice in my ears —

"Mavis! My darling!—"

I was safe. I tried to put my arms around his neck, but they fell weakly to my side. He took my hands in his and clasped them where they belonged. I was lifted, borne swiftly through the night.

Crimson flame and smoke — a roaring — a voice pleading with me to raise my head, to answer, only to speak —.

Darkness . . .

CHAPTER XX

Once, in the night, I awoke — fully. Before that, there had been periods of half-stupor, and then, a deep, restful sleep. But just for a minute, I was wide-awake, abnormally conscious.

"Bill?"

He was sitting beside the bed. The light was very dim. His hand was on my bandaged hand which was lying over the sheet.

"Dearest?"

"You're all right?"

"I'm well," he said, "and you will be much better in the morning. Close the dear eyes now, and sleep."

"You won't go away?"

"Never. Go to sleep, Mavis."

In the morning he was still there, sleeping, wrapped in his funny, fuzzy bathrobe, in a big chair close to the bed. His hand was still on mine.

I looked for a long minute at his tired face. One eyebrow was burned almost all off. There were marks of burns on his face. And he was smiling in his sleep.

I felt so rested, so very well, except for a languor and a weakness. My hands pained me. Both, I was amused to discover, were bandaged. There was a little burn on my arm.

Through water and fire —

"Good morning!" said Bill, smiling at me.

I closed my eyes against the look in his. It was beau-

tiful to have him look at me so, but I could not bear it.

"G-Good morning," said I, and felt the hot color flood my face. From the tips of my toes to the roots of my hair I was blushing.

It was very early. The sudden tropical dawn was only a few minutes old. There was a riot of bird-song outside the window, and a wonderful, dew-washed breeze blowing through the room.

"Mavis?" said Bill.

He was on his knees beside the bed. I put out one bandaged hand and clumsily touched his hair.

"Do you know what you've done?" he asked.

"Been a fool, as usual," I suggested, looking ruefully at the bandages.

"Sweet little fool," he said, in that new, deep voice. "Mavis, how could you, you frightened me almost to death —?"

I thought of those leaping flames, the angry, crimson sky, and shuddered.

"I'm sorry," I said meekly.

He gave a little low laugh under his quickened breath.

"You love me!" announced my husband arrogantly, beginning, as usual, at the wrong end.

"Why so I do!" I admitted in a small voice.

His arms went around me, gently, closely, and I shut my eyes under the touch of his lips on their lids. The dawn-birds were singing — in the room: in my heart.

"I love you," said Bill, and kissed my mouth.

I lay quite still then, between tears and laughter.

"It has taken you," I said, "a very long time to find it out!"

"It took me," he contradicted pleasantly, "about three minutes. From the very first — darling."

"Me, too!" said I, in utter astonishment. It was true. From the very first. I had fought a good fight, I thought, as I lay there in my utter content, against this heavenly surrender. I pity men who never know this wonderful release of self.

Followed a half-hour of the most ridiculous cross-examination:

"When did you first —?"

"Do you remember —?"

"How could you say —?"

"Whose girl are you, Mavis? Tell me!"

And all the rest of the eternal litany of lovers.

Sarah, peeped in to see how I was. Silas, I discovered from her beaming countenance, was all right. I had forgotten to ask. It was with assumed enthusiasm that I heard that a portion of the cane had been saved. It really didn't matter — not to me. Nothing matttered. Only Bill, and my sense of Harbor in the Far Country of my dreams —

"Such a nice fire!" I said, happily, my face on Bill's one unscarred shoulder.

"You little wretch!"

He kissed me again.

Norah arrived with a very early breakfast. I twisted in Bill's hold. To no avail. Bar, again, such strong bars, so tender, so utterly protective.

"What's the matter?"

"Norah —"

"But," said Bill in triumph, after the door had been shut behind the smiling woman, "after all, Mavis, we're married!"

"Why, so we are!"

I sat up in bed and stared at him.

"It's not fair!" said I, hotly.

"What?"

"We've not even been engaged," I said, "or anything. I don't like it!"

"Don't you, honestly?"

I shook my head, and then nodded, violently.

"You darling!" said my new Bill. "You lovely little thing. I adore you —"

"Why didn't you tell me so before?" I asked, in what was a deplorably peevish tone.

"Tell you! And get my face slapped! You were the prickliest small porcupine, for all your soft ways — rather not! But Gosh," said Bill, "it was hard —"

"You might have saved us a lot of trouble," said I reproachfully.

He got to his feet and sat on the edge of the bed.

"Might I? I didn't know, you see. I had had your repeated assurance that you regarded me as dirt under your little feet. How could I tell you?"

"You were awfully stupid!" said I, with keen satisfaction.

But he was kissing my finger-tips, protruding stiffly through the neat bandaging.

"Dear little hands!" he said. "Oh, Mavis — if anything had happened to you —"

"If anything had happened to *you* —!" said I, and for a moment we looked at each other in a sort of blind horror. Presently he smiled.

"But we're as right as rain!" said he. "We're young, all life before us — and we love each other — Thank God!" he ended, on a deep, grave note.

"Thank God!" said I, and put my arms up to him.

When he raised his head, his eyes were shining.

"My beloved wife!" said Bill.

I put him from me for a moment — looked into his eyes.

"Please," I said, very low, "it's all so new — and a little terrifying. I — I didn't know I could feel like this. Will you let us go on just as we are — for a little while —? Perhaps I'm silly — but — I can't help it. Please," I begged, "won't you let me get a little used to you —?"

His eyes were very tender now.

"Of course," he said. "You know that."

"A real engagement!" said I happily.

"That's the best thing, after all," said Bill, laughing, "married first, and then engaged for the rest of one's life!"

He held me very closely.

"I'll cherish you always," he said, "all my life long. I've wanted you so — Mavis. You'll never know. God bless you, my dearest!"

"Father," I said in my heart, "you were right: you knew. I'm so happy —"

And my heart answered me.

"Where are you going?" said I, sternly, to my husband, as he laid me back on my pillows and turned away.

"Outside," said he, with the old, impish grin, "to dance a fandango on the lawn! And, incidentally, to put on some clothes and pretend an intelligent interest — which I don't in the least experience — in Harry Reynolds destroyed sugar-crop. Bless those incendiary natives!" he added, piously.

"Back soon?" I asked.

"Don't look at me like that!" said Bill severely, "or I won't be able to go! As your physician I forbid you

to endanger my pulse. It is hardly normal now. Try and rest, dear, and when I come back I want to see more steady color in your cheeks. You've had a pretty bad shock, Mavis —"

"I should say I have!" I said, in tones I vainly tried to infuse with self-pity. "How about yourself?"

He blew me a kiss — just a mean, tiny one — and vanished without answering, but poked his head in at the door immediately after, to ask, seriously,

"Shall I bring you a statement of your indebtedness to me when I return, Mrs. Denton?"

"I wish I'd cost you more," said I, crossly. "You just wait — I'm going to buy a trousseau when I get to New York that will put you in the poor-house. I'm afraid," said I primly, "that I must ask you to wait for your settlement, Doctor."

"I'll keep you so in debt," he declared, "that you will never be able to struggle out, and you'll pay me in love, young person, for every sleepless night I've spent, and every swear I've sworn behind closed doors, and for every time I've wanted to take you in my arms and kiss you till you cried for mercy —"

"I think — I shouldn't have cried," I said, reflectively.

He was back in the room again.

"For heaven's sake," said I, extricating myself with some difficulty, "what will people think — door open and everything?"

But it was fully ten minutes before he really went.

I closed my eyes, and with Father's miniature under my pillow, tried to sleep. So happy — so happy! It was hard to lie still and think. So I didn't think. I kissed the ring on my finger, under the bandages, half a dozen times, and slept, at last, drifting from dream into dream.

Life was very wonderful. And the Love that had suffered and strayed was the most perfect, at the last. For all the times I had hurt him, how I would repay my husband, with depth on depth of devotion. I would make it up to him —

Through water and fire. . . .

CHAPTER XXI

The boat pulled slowly away from the docks. Standing at the rail, I could plainly see the brilliant feather on Mercedes' little French hat, nodding in the breeze. A fleck of white was in her hand, now fluttering frantically, now at her eyes. Wright, beside her, was gesticulating like a semaphore, and not far away, Silas was straining his keen eyes to catch the last glimpse of his Sarah. Presently the docks faded into a vari-colored blur, and Bill pulled me away from the rail.

"Good-by, Cuba!" I said, waving my hand for the last time, as I turned.

"You're not crying?" he asked, teasingly.

"No," I dried my eyes a little defiantly, "but I have loved it so. Color and warmth and sunshine," I said, watching the soft pastel shades of the shore line, where Morro Castle stood, dazzling in the light, its stone feet set in blue waters, "and I hated to leave, somehow —"

"We'll go back," said he. "No, don't go below. Sarah will unpack and settle for you. I bribed the steward to give us these chairs. Sit down, darling, and let me tuck you up."

Obediently, I sat, and he sprawled his long length beside me, cupping his pipe in his hands, to shield the match flare from the wind.

"But I argued, "it won't be like going back to 'The Palms.' I'll hate the nasty people who are going to buy it — do you suppose they'll buy Arthur, too?"

"Do you want him?" asked Bill.

I turned my hand so that the light fell on the big, new diamond on my finger. Bill had bought it in Havana, two days after the fire. It was my engagement ring, he said, and I had gotten up more than once in the last few nights to admire it by candle or moonlight. It was like a drop of dew. I told him that when he gave it to me, and he had added "on a white flower," and had kissed the finger he slipped it on.

"Want Arthur? I think not. He'd be the scandal of Green Hill, and perhaps he'd not thrive away from Guayabal —"

"Shall I buy 'The Palms'?" asked Bill, pushing his cap back from his forehead, so that the sun fell across his face.

"Are you crazy?" I demanded.

"Possibly."

He slipped his hand under the rug across my knees and took mine.

"What do you think?" he asked, gravely.

"I think you are," said I. "Such extravagance! Delusions of grandeur. But, anyway, I'd rather we built our own house —"

"So would I," said Bill, with satisfaction.

"Couldn't we add to the Green Hill house?" I asked, "an office for you — and more rooms? Do you mind?" I said. "So much of me is in that house. I don't want to forget those years —. And I was born there. My Mother came there as a bride — and I think Father will want us to live there always — unless," I added careful, "you have other plans, Doctor Denton?"

Bill laughed.

"No. When we get home, if your Father is willing,

I'll turn you loose with painters and carpenters and decorators — as long as I may always smoke, even in the 'best parlour' and as long as you don't banish me and my bottles to the garage — for we'll have to have a garage, you know, and I've spoken to Silas about that little house in the garden. There's lots of room."

"Chintz," I said dreamily, "creton,— lots of it — and another fireplace — and oodles of bookshelves. Bill, may I dig in the garden next summer?"

"I shouldn't wonder," he answered cheerfully. "You're really remarkably strong — beyond my wildest hopes. I was amazed to see how soon you recovered from the effects of the fire —"

I looked at the little scars on my hands. They would go, eventually, I knew. Bill had said so. I was a little sorry.

"Were you?" I asked. "But I had a very good doctor, and wonderful medicine —"

He kissed me, to the horror of a passing elderly couple.

"Then," said I, straightening my cap, "you'll practise in Green Hill, after all? People will say you'll be burying yourself there —"

"Let 'em," said Bill. "I shall have time, at last, for all the things I want to do. Time, ambition and encouragement. We'll have a laboratory — away from the house, so your little nose won't be offended and turn up even more —"

"It doesn't," said I, one hand to the insulted feature.

"It does. Don't contradict. I love it! — A laboratory," he went on, "and I can work again on that cancer-cure —"

"Oh, Bill," I said, "isn't it wonderful? To think that

perhaps you can bring a blessing to all the world, and I may help — a little —"

We were silent for a while — such a comfortable, understanding silence.

"Aunt Mavis," said Peter, appearing suddenly on deck, "Sarah has gone to bed!"

"Is she ill?" I asked, viewing the water, which was like blue glass.

"Not yet," said Peter gravely, "but she says she's taking no chances!"

"Poor Sarah!" I said, as Bill laughed. "Stay here with your uncle, Peterkins, and I'll go and see if I can do anything for her."

When I returned, I found my young charge and my husband hanging perilously over the rail, watching the antics of the flying-fish.

"Aren't they pretty?" I asked, joining them, "like tiny, colored aeroplanes."

We watched for some time in silence, and then Peter growing sleepy, for we had gotten up very early that morning, Bill tucked him into a rug in a chair, and we left him asleep almost instantly, to walk the deck until luncheon.

"I've got a scheme," said Bill. "Want to hear?"

"Uh-huh!" said I.

"New York first. Uncle John's, or, if you'd rather, a hotel. Your Dad will meet us. We'll ship Sarah on to Green Hill with Peter, to get the house in order and to look after the boy until the Goodriches return. When is it — ten days? And after you've gone on that shopping orgy you threatened me with, I'll have one of the men bring my car down from Green Hill and we'll motor. Would you like that?"

"Oh, Bill, where?" I asked, skipping a little, and collapsing up against his side as the boat rolled.

"Cape Cod, I thought, if you'd care about it. There's a dear old inn at Provincetown — I know you'd love it. We could go there, for a week or so — it's so early yet we'd have the place to ourselves. And then, early in May, back to Green Hill and settle for the summer. What do you think?"

"I think you're a darling!" I answered, brazenly, and with just the effect I had calculated. And after we had told each other several times that no one in the world could be as happy and as much in love as we were — and firmly believed it, too! — Bill said suddenly,

"I cabled Mother from Cuba — and wrote her. She will meet us in New York."

"For heaven's sake," said I, "do you think she'll like me?"

"Can't tell," said Bill, solemnly, "she's odd. But, after all, it isn't as if you were a stranger. You've corresponded with her, you know, and she made you some bed-socks. That's a bond."

"But that was Richard Warren's mother," I said, not quite convinced.

"She's mine too. Funny, isn't it? I think you've committed bigamy."

"Is she really little and blue-eyed and red-haired?" I asked, "or was that poetic license?"

"Honest truth. She's the prettiest thing in the world — except you. And I've written her all about it."

"Did she know that I didn't know you were you?" I asked somewhat incoherently. But he understood. That was one of the nice things about Bill — recently, anyway. He was the Person Who Understood.

He nodded.

"Yes, but she didn't know everything — not that we were married."

"Why?" I asked, curiously.

He smiled down at me, very big, very protective.

"Why, you see," said Bill gently, "she knew that I loved you. And she'd got to love you too. After all, she has a weakness for me, and an unbounded faith in my choice. And so — well, I didn't want to disappoint her — didn't want her to know how matters stood — that we weren't quite happy. So I waited. After a while, I grew afraid that she would have to be told after all —"

"Please, don't," I said hastily. "What did you write her?"

"Cabled first: 'Married Mavis. Meet us in New York at Uncle John's as soon as you can.' And then, I wrote and sent it by someone who was sailing sooner. She will break the trip from California in Chicago, she has cousins there. I hope the letter will catch her."

"I've never had a mother," I said, the least bit wistfully.

"You have one now," said Bill.

Cuba had long since disappeared. I closed my eyes for a second to keep the memory of all we had left clear and vivid. The Palms — the cane, as it had looked before the fire, emerald-green and graceful — the red soil of Guayabal and the long, white roads — the mountains in the distance — the palm-trees, straight as arrows, with their rustling tops — my own orchids, little lavender balloons — peacocks and ox-carts — naked brown babies creeping in the sun — sunlight on adobe and thatch — and Arthur, screaming raucously for his morning coffee.

No, I would never forget.

The trip passed like a dream. Peter found some American children to play with on the boat, and romped with them under the watchful eyes of a correct English nurse. Sarah, with Wiggles, kept to her cabin. And Bill and I, exchanging polite platitudes with the people at our table, were left very much to ourselves. And the voyage was calm, totally unlike the one we had taken so many months before.

It was on the boat that I read some of Richard Warren's new poems, part of the new volume. And, sitting in a sheltered corner of the deck, I watched my husband write the dedication across a white sheet of paper:

"To my wife."

"I'm very proud," said I, a little tremulously. "They are beautiful. Wright knew. He said they were bigger and finer than the others. But," I added, "after all, I fell in love with *The Lyric Hour,* Bill."

"But these," said Bill, "are your own."

And so they were.

"Now," he said," suppose you show me what you were so careful to hide from me in Cuba?"

"Did Wright—?" I began indignantly, "What do you mean?"

"No, Wright didn't. But I guessed. Have I written for nothing all these years? I'm a sleuth when it comes to a fellow-craftsman. Besides, there's this—"

He drew a crumpled sheet from his inner pocket. I snatched at it.

"That old thing!" said I, with scorn. "Where did you find it?"

"I couldn't account for your inky little hands and your fits of abstraction," he answered, "solely by an explana-

tion of your love for letter-writing and your dislike of me."

"Where did you find it, Creature?" I demanded again.

"In Wright's pocket. Old coat, on a chair — I was looking for a match."

"Doesn't sound plausible," said I, spreading out the blotted paper. Bill read with me, over my shoulder.

AFTER SUNSET

Carved in dull ebony, one somber row
Of straight palms, etched in sudden, sharp relief,
Against a molten-copper afterglow. . . .
Oh, Hour of Enchantment, past belief,
When down the garden paths the peacocks go,
In plumed splendor and with stately tread.
Across the shadowed valleys cool winds blow,
From where the smoke-blue mountain rears its head.
Beyond the world's rim, slips the ghost-wan Day,
To draw Night's curtain close about her bed
And set a star to light her to her rest,
While Evening, shaking free her dusky hair,
Lures every weary bird to seek its nest,
And, kissing shut the tired eyes of care,
Lulls Earth to peace upon her gentle breast.

"I didn't mean you to know," I said, as he took the verse away from me again and put it back in his pocket.

"But you told Wright," said he.

"That was different," I answered, firmly.

"Mad?"

"N-No!"

He slipped his arm around me.

"Mavis," he said very softly, "Mavis with the amber hair and the deep brown eyes. Mavis, child and poet and — all mine."

"You're not laughing?" I asked anxiously. "I mean, about the verses?"

"Laughing?" he raised his head from my hair. My cap had fallen off, and it blew in wildest confusion about my face and his. "I'm very far from laughing. I'm proud and happy. But," said he, with a change of tone, "to steal my thunder! You'll be dabbling in my pill-boxes yet! I suppose I may as well reconcile myself to being known as 'the husband of Mavis Denton.' Appalling outlook!"

"Is it?" I asked impishly.

"Well — in that sense at least. 'Husband of The Poetess.' It wounds my masculine pride."

"It shouldn't," said I, triumphantly, "if it ever happened — which, of course, it won't. But I will be quite content to be known as Richard Warren's wife —"

"You dear! But, of course, you have a better disposition than I have —"

"I haven't! I'm a petulant, snappish, mean —"

"You're the loveliest thing God ever made!"

And so on, ad infinitum.

The lazy, happy trip over, we sailed importantly into New York once more. Father and Uncle John were on the dock, two bronzed, happy men, and it was late that night before I got to sleep, in that same, old-fashioned room, my head in a perfect whirl. How we had talked and laughed, questioned and answered! From the twinkle in Uncle John's eyes, the tenderest, most quizzical twinkle, I half-suspected that he knew more than I had thought. He didn't say so, but if he didn't know — well, he had developed perfectly miraculous powers of teasing since I had left. But he was a dear. And it was so amazing to sit there and listen to him and Bill discuss the

new volume, and to put my little, critical oar in now and then, while Father sat by, my hand in his, a look of the most wonderful content on his face. They had great difficulty to persuade me to go to bed. It was fascinating to linger in the smoky old room, with its rows and rows of books and its untidy, comfortable, masculine atmosphere. After I had three times refused to leave them, Bill unceremoniously picked me up and carried me up the stairs, kicking, and losing my slippers on the way.

Did I say that a wire was waiting for me when I reached Uncle John's?

"LOVE TO YOU BOTH," it read. "WILL BE WITH YOU WEDNESDAY AT THE LATEST," and it was addressed to me, and signed, "MOTHER."

Wednesday was two days off. I spent the intervening time in the outrageous shops, Bill stalking uneasily behind me, deferred to by the lithe, wonderfully coiffured, purring Goddesses who paraded mannequin after pretty mannequin before my startled eyes. I think, however, that Bill was a little more embarrassed than I.

"How they live," he said to me, seriously, on one occasion, "I don't see. I should think they'd spend most of their time in a pneumonia ward!"

We drove in the Park one afternoon. It was gay with Spring flowers and pretty girls. We had a hansom, because I had read about them in books. Coming back, through the falling dusk, with the lights of the city twinkling out, yellow and beckoning, and the great, massive bulk of the Plaza, illuminated like a birthday cake, just ahead, I suddenly conceived an affection for New York. But I didn't want to live there.

"Next time we come," said Bill, "in the Fall, perhaps, I want to take you to the theatres and to the gayest res-

taurants, and concerts. Why, you funny child, your eyes are as big as saucers!"

Our lean horse stumbled just then, and the hansom gave a seasick lurch. I felt as people mounting camels must feel. When the horse and I had somewhat recovered, I answered,

"I'd love it! And you'll teach me to dance — sometime? — May I?"

"Well," said Bill gravely, "I'm not much of a dancer — too big and all that. I always step on the dear things' feet. But you may, I think, and we'll take lessons together, if you like —"

"I'd adore it!" I said.

My husband drew me close —,

"You baby," he said. "Sometimes I think I have been selfish, tying you down to a cross old husband before you've had your good times —"

"Don't want any good times without you!" I said, obstinately.

"All right," said he. "We'll have them together. I'll renew my youth!"

"Don't be absurd! You're a mere infant!"

"Second childhood," he said, "you've been an elixir of youth to me; of life itself."

"You do say such nice things," I sighed. "That comes of being a poet!"

"Poet be hanged!" said Bill. "It comes of being in love — with — you — with you —"

That was a very nice drive. After all, the hansom has advantages. One can sit awfully close, and hold hands under the shiny, wooden apron.

Wednesday Mother came. I called her that right off. She was the dearest thing, with such curly red hair and

eyes the color of Bill's, only a different shape. She was littler than I even, with hands and feet that were wholly ridiculous. Father was immediately enchanted with her. The four of us had a long talk, all one soft Spring day, interrupted by Uncle John, and by getting Peter and Sarah safely off to Green Hill. And then, while I was resting, she had her talk with her son, and came to me later, after I had gone to bed.

She curled up beside me in a wonderful blue negligée which made her look like a girl. And we talked — and talked.

"You're the nicest thing that Bill has given me," I said, happily, before she left, "and Bill's the nicest thing you could give me. You don't feel," I begged, "that I am taking him away from you —?"

"I love you," she answered, the laughter gone from her eyes, and her face very sweet to see, "for yourself — for Bill too, but most of all for yourself. I have wanted this since he first wrote me about you. I have prayed for it every night. You were so exactly the sort of a girl I wanted my boy to marry —"

"But," I said, "I was just a little, bed-ridden, useless creature then —"

"I knew that Bill would cure you," said Mother. "He always gets what he wants —"

"Doesn't he though?" I interrupted, proudly.

"And he wanted you!"

"I love him so," I whispered against the soft lace at her breast.

She put her arms very closely around me. I don't know why I cried.

And then, she talked to me. Just as my own Mother would have done — very gravely and tenderly for a long

half-hour. When she left my room, I lay awake a long time, thinking about her and Bill, wondering if I could ever be to him all that she had said I would be. I was happy, a little frightened, and so grateful — so grateful.

CHAPTER XXII

The entire household saw us off on our motor trip. Uncle John beaming, Mrs. Cardigan and the maids waving hands and aprons, Mother smiling at us through a mist. She was coming to Green Hill as soon as we were settled, and help me with my first housekeeping. She had demurred at first when I begged her to: had said that "young people were better off alone." But I, and then Bill, when he found how much I really wanted her and finally Father had overridden all her objections. I didn't tell my menfolk that it was delightful to have someone to whom you could talk "Bill" by the hour, and who never grew tired of listening and encouraging and interrupting with paeans of praise of her own.

"What will she think of Mercedes?" I asked, as we rolled through the city, out toward the sunshine and open spaces.

"She'll like her," said Bill. "Mother's a judge, and she adopted Wright long ago."

"Those two wild children," I said, tolerantly.

The maddest cablegram had come to us just before we left. I was still convulsed by it:

Mercedes willing wedding in fall out of my head with happiness everything wonderful thank you a thousand times will see you very soon most marvelous girl in the world sends her love so do *I*

"WRIGHT"

"I suppose they expect us to be surprised," I said. "Ostriches!"

"I always knew you were a matchmaker," said Bill, "you certainly staged the whole thing well."

"I had her out to amuse you, not Wright," said I, with partial truth.

"Oh, you did, did you? 'The best laid plans'—. Didn't you know that I haven't had eyes or ears for another woman since that first night you insulted me—"

"'Doctor Jumpy!'" said I, in delighted recollection.

"If it weren't that I have to drive the car—" said Bill.

"Perhaps, later, you could stop—" I suggested.

He stopped in the midst of the still considerable traffic. And then we sped on again, leaving a breathless, open-mouthed policeman struck into stone, behind us.

"Boston," said I to Bill, after we had been there for two hours, "is the darnedest place!"

"What's the matter with it? Cradle of American culture and everythin'."

"Reminds me of Havana," I said.

"Havana! You're insane!" Bill laid his fork down and gazed at me in amazement over the table in the Copley Plaza.

"Because it's so different," I said, "but the streets aren't much wider, so there. And after all, I think I could fall in love with the Common, and even Back Bay. There's something very solid about it all."

As we left the city and went on through the lovely Massachusetts country, I became more and more enamoured of my own unknown New England. And Bill, delightful companion, grew positively instructive. I learned a little history by the way, and we poked around and explored, in a very leisurely manner.

Wellesley, dignified and gracious, fascinated me. We went up to the college and spent a happy half-day there with one of the professors who had been a school friend of Bill's, no, our Mother's. But I couldn't help thinking of Mercedes! My bright, tropical bird, caged in a classroom, filing to chapel with hundreds of other girls, part of a crowd. I determined to go some day to Vassar and see her Waterloo for myself.

Pride's Crossing filled me with envy. I liked the beautifully kept lawns and the wonderful, garden-encircled houses. But I fell so deeply in love with Gloucester, even the fish, that Bill despaired of ever getting me away.

"Wait till you see Salem!" he said, "I'll probably have to tuck a door in the back-seat. You'll want one, I know. Jolliest doors in the world."

Magnolia, Salem, Plymouth, they went by like dreams. The big hotels where we stayed, the water, the Spring skies, the first reticent flowers, and finally, the funny little Cape towns: Hyannis Port, with its beaches and docks, its high Sunset Hill, where we watched the sun go down red and purple over the quiet bay, and where we saw the white sails of the fishing-crafts lift like wings against the morning sky — it was all so lovely, so new, so untarnished for me. I even loved the grey fog that swept in at night, like soft veils. And everywhere, serious or gay, always the perfect comrade, was Bill. I would lie awake in the mornings listening to him splash in the shower or whistling to himself in his room, not calling out good morning to him for five whole minutes, just happy at having him so near.

But Provincetown!

We came into it on a wonderful, clear morning, into that sleepy, little town, girdled with sand, on the edge of the

wide, blue bay. Some of the cottages were open, even as early as it was in the season, and the little streets were bright with people. Our Inn was close down on the beach, a dark-red, rambling building, built half a century before, and beautifully remodelled for modern purposes. There were ships' lanterns and clocks within, a wide, glassed verandah on which one consumed quantities of delicious food and salt air, a ship's rope for the banister of the stairway which led, steeply, up to the second floor. Beyond the landing was my room, with three great windows fronting the bay. One could almost have flung a stone into the water from them.

The room was in rose-color, like my own room at home, and cool, dull green. Counter-pane, chair cushions, curtains, and dressing-table rioted with delightfully impossible roses, and the whole room smelled of salt and sun and the little lavender and rose-leaf bags I found in bureau-drawers and on closet-shelves. And my bath was big and white, a tiled, immaculate room, with cross-stitched towels and washrags, sweet-scented soaps and a dazzling array of bottles and toothbrush-mugs.

"How can I clean my razor on this?" demanded Bill, appearing in my room with a little towel held at arm's length. He surveyed the silken baskets of flowers designed upon it, with an air of deep concern.

"Oh, but you mustn't!" I said, snatching it from him in dismay.

"Oh, but I must!" he contradicted. "Look at this beard! We left Chatham so early this morning that I didn't get a moment to shave."

I rubbed my cheek against the square, firm chin.

"Ouch!"

"I told you so!"

"Come with me," I said, with dignity, and led him into his own bathroom, where I produced for him certain small towels, hanging under a legend "For your razor," and left him chuckling.

Bill's room was blue and yellow, and he complained that it was far too pretty for a man. We were still arguing about it when we went forth to survey the town. I popped in and out of shops like "an agitated rabbit," according to Bill, and bought armsful of bayberry candles, little delicate water-colors, and about six old, brass knockers; the last named purchases moving Bill to say that he supposed we would have to put one on the garage and another on the hen-coop.

The little inn was deserted save for us, the maids, an amiable and remarkable colored cook, and the adorable little lady who was our hostess. She had a tenderness for brides and grooms! Bill recalled her as having said so on the one occasion he had lunched with her, in Provincetown, in the "dark ages before I met you, Mavis," and I think she was happy to have us there. At all events, she never said so if she was not, and we stayed for two, wonderful weeks.

It was too early for swimming, of course, even for Bill's iron constitution, but we spent hours on the yellow sands, watching the boats, and the sunlight shifting over the water. Once a battleship steamed in and anchored not far away, and that evening there were Navy men in the porch-dining-room, quite beautiful in their uniforms, very splendid to look at, under the soft lights of the ships' lanterns, lingering over their coffee and cigars.

Bill scraped acquaintance with them, of course, with the consequence that we had tea one afternoon aboard the ship, with the most cordial and charming hosts in the

world. I had not been there half an hour, palpitant with excitement, before every unmarried officer present had gotten me aside on one pretext or another and shown me the picture of "the prettiest girl in the world, Mrs. Denton!" And I will say for the Benedicts too, that their tiny cabins were filled with pictures of wives and babies. It was a very pleasant tea-hour, but Bill hurried me home long before I was tired of deck and guns, mascot — a frisky goat named "Narcissus," and the crowds of amusing sailor-boys in their infantile garb.

"Haven't had you to myself for a dog's age," he growled. "What did those men mean, carrying you off like that, with their 'Mrs. Denton, please come with me,' or 'Oh, Mrs. Denton, I've got something to show you.' Jackasses!"

"I thought them very nice," said I demurely, "especially that tall one with all the gold braid and the fascinating eyes."

"Fascinating eyes! Ye Gods! Never again, young woman!" and he hustled me out of the ship's boat, across the sand and into the house, lest, as he said, "The eyes-fellow should be standing with field glasses on the deck waiting to wave to you again!"

When we were in our rooms again, and I had called him to hook me up — we were dressing for dinner — he came in and, fumbling with those clever surgeon's fingers at the hooks of my frock, swept me and the frock suddenly and breathlessly into his arms.

"Don't keep me waiting too long, Mavis," he said, very low.

I put my arms around his neck and said something in his ear. And after a moment he kissed me, very gently, and let me go. It was ten minutes before I realized that

he had gone without completing his task of lady's maid.

That night a full moon rose, golden and glamorous, over the bay. Bill and I walked out on the sands, quite late. I had on a wooly, white coat over my thin dress, and had changed to more sensible shoes. After all, I thought, it was worth a dozen Cubas, the keen, salt air, and the dear home country, just stirring under the breath of Spring.

"Happy?" asked Bill, as we sat down on some drift-wood logs and watched the ever-widening golden wake of the moon-boat.

I leaned my head against his shoulder and nodded.

"You've never looked so beautiful," he said, "as to-night."

I drew his tall head down to mine,

"Do you think so?" I whispered, and then, very softly, "I love you, my husband —"

Together, in the full glory of the moonlight, we walked in silence back to the house. The lights gleamed above in my rose and green bedroom, and the door was open be-tween —

CHAPTER XXIII

GREEN HILL
June.

Has it seemed long to you, little Diary? Yet it is just a year since my first entry was made. I'm writing now in my room with the windows wide. Bill has just called up to me that my pink rose-bush is in flower. I must go down and see. I can hear Mother on the lawn talking to Mrs. Goodrich and Father and Peter. Or is it Wiggles? She employs almost the same tone toward both of them. And Sarah, a good ten years younger than last year, is out where the new cottage is soon to be. She has the builder with her, and I know that they are disagreeing. It will be a boon to Sarah to have the Simpson tribe — as much of it as are carpenters — working on her house for her. A pretty revenge!

"A new Doctor has come to Green Hill!" Just a year ago — Diary — and since then so much has happened. So much sorrow and happiness, loss and gain. It is hard to believe that it is I who write, Mavis of Green Hill.

The people have been so good since I came home: so glad for me. They tell me I look a different person — and why not, pray? For I am strong and well and most divinely happy, Diary, and it is pleasant to be able to write that down for you — after all the despondencies I did not spare your pages.

There's the new house to build — and this one to re-

model in the Fall — and the garage already under way. It will be ready for Silas to putter about in by the time he comes North. And in August we are to expect Mercedes, which means Wright, of course. I have been able to persuade the Howells that Cuba is all very well, but Mercedes must be married from my house — and they have consented. I think that Mr. Howells is glad that it will be so.

The reviewers have been kind to Bill's new book. It was rushed through and appeared early this month. The secret has been let out, of course, and the poor villagers of Green Hill are mightily embarrassed at having harbored a famous poet for so long without knowing it. And they get the name quite confused. It's " Doctor Warren " half the time!

My dear old Dr. Mac has been to see us more than once. We've had wonderful evenings, in the late June dusk, a happy family, lacking nothing, content with just living and loving —

Mother and Dr. Mac are such friends. She actually flirts with him, in her Dresden China way, and he growls. But he likes it. I am sure he is half in love with her already — he couldn't very well help being.

Bill's here — his hand on my shoulder, smelling nicely of damp, new earth!

" Go away! "

" Why? "

" I'm writing! "

" So I see — but what, little wife? "

" The end of a story."

And under his eyes, Diary, I have turned back your pages and drawn a thick, black line through that pitiful entry made on my wedding day — drawn a thicker, blacker line through that sombre little word " Finis."

"Kiss me, William Denton!"

And now, with his kiss on my lips, I have turned back to what I have just written and am writing, letter by letter, with a steady hand and a high heart, between laughter and tears, two firm, exultant words:

THE BEGINNING